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THORGILS

BY
MAURICE HEWLETT

Author of "The Forest Lovers," "The Life and Death
of Richard Yea and Nay," "Love and Lucy," etc.



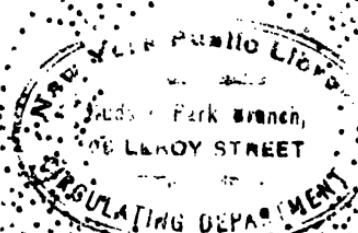
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THORGILS



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THORGILS

CHAPTER I

THE KILLING OF THE HORSE

TREADHOLT lies in the South-west country between Markfleet and Cogsound. It is all pasture thereabouts, deep and good land; but behind that, the tumble of rock begins, great rocks brought down from Eyjafell in old days; and after them the heather and peat hags mount upwards to the fells; and over the top of the fells are waste and desolate places, rent apart by crevasses and deep ghylls; and if you have heart enough to carry you on, beyond this region lie the snowslopes which will take you to the top of Eyjafell itself.

But all that was a long way from Treadholt where Thord Domme, or Timber Thord, as we should say, lived, and where Thorgils and his brother were born.

Timber Thord had been a strong and bold man, who became a famous man by the slaying of Raven Thorwidsson. He had had an old quarrel with Raven, who was reckoned a hero in those parts, and laid in wait for him one day as he was riding down to Einarshaven, to a ship he had there. He came riding through the howes in his fine blue cloak, thinking of pleasant things, when he saw Timber Thord standing between two howes, waiting for him. Raven hailed him, but Thord would not return the greeting; but instead hurled his spear and hit Raven full in the breast and transfixes him. The manslaughter was written off against others done by Raven—but Thord's name stood high after such a deed; and Thord himself married Thorwen, who was Osgar's daughter, Osgar's the Eastmen-Smiter, and settled down at Treadholt, where his fathers had been established a long time. Thorwen gave him two sons, Thorgils and Thorleik. All their names were of this stamp, for this was in the days before Iceland was christened, and Thor had the devotion of all the South country, rather than Frey, who prevailed in the North and North-west, or Odin, who had his worship elsewhere.

When Thorgils was a bare-breeched youngster of two-three years old, a blue-eyed, red-cheeked, tumble-haired, bare-breeched youngster more often dirty than not, Timber Thord had become rich, and intended to become richer. What store he had in silver money and goods he buried in the earth, and then bought a ship in Cogsound and prepared for a voyage to Norway. He wanted Thorwen, his wife, to go with him; but she said, No, she would stay at home. There were the children, and the treasure in the ground. So she looked after house and stock at Treadholt, as well she might, being a notable housewife; and Thord stood out to sea in his new ship.

He never came back. All the summer and winter following Thorwen looked for him. She got into the way of crossing the river at the ford and mounting the peat moss to a ridge from where you could see Cogsound, and beyond that to Portland Neb. Somehow or another she did that every day; and even through the winter she managed to get up there. She took Thorgils with her when it was possible. Then the weather broke up, the rain came, and the days grew longer. There was work to be

done on the land; a man called Thorgrim Scarleg came to Treadholt as reeve, and Thorwen gave up her daily walk to the ridge.

Thorgils was puzzled at that. He did not see why she left off doing what she had always done. He couldn't remember when she had not done it. "Aren't you going to look for my father's ship?"

She shook her head.

"He won't come any more," she said. He thought that very odd.

"Why won't he?" he wanted to know.

She looked out over the sea. "He is drowned, my son."

"Drowned?" said Thorgils. "Do you mean he is dead?"

She nodded her head sharply, and that set the tears running down.

"Then," said Thorgils, "I am master here." He was nearly four years old, but Thorwen turned away to her affairs, and left him alone. Thorgils marched off to the ridge to look for his father, but the river was swollen with the rain, and in high flood. The stones were hidden, and he did not like the look of it. He remained by the river side till dinner-time,

and kept to himself. He saw Thorgrim the new reeve dunging the meadows, but did not choose to go to him. Thorgrim was a red-faced, silent man, good-tempered enough; but Thorgils never took to him.

That summer Thorwen and Thorgrim came to an understanding, and made up their minds to keep house together. Great trouble came of it in after days with which this tale has nothing to do; but meantime there was trouble enough in the mind of Thorgils when he understood what was in the wind. From the very first he and Thorgrim did not get on together. Thorgils was only a little boy, but he remembered his father and did not believe that so fine and decisive a man could have allowed himself to be lost at sea. Without knowing how to put it he had a grudge against his mother—not on his own account, but on his father's. Much more allowance ought to have been made for him—for such a man as that.

He said nothing more about being master at Treadholt. Indeed he was rather ashamed of himself for having said it. Had that been giving his father a chance? No, it had not. But apart from that, a boy always knows what he

can do and what he can't. Thorgrim took his father's place at board, by the fire, and abed. The steading, the stock, the thralls, the maids, the fields, all fell under his charge. There was no use in fighting against it; and, of course, as time went on, he grew used to the state of things, and forgot all about his father. The first time he heard himself called Scarleg's stepson he had flamed all over his face; the second time he had lost his temper and pushed in among the girls at their washing-tubs. "I am Thordsson, I tell you. I am—I am." Some of them had laughed at him, but one had taken him in her arms and kissed him. "Well spoken, Thorgils," she had said. He had fought to get away from her; but he had liked her for it nevertheless. Afterwards the new name became so common that he took no notice of it, and once he found himself calling himself so.

But he did not get on well at home after Thorgrim came, and wasn't there very long. The end of all things at Treadholt happened in the summer when he was five years old.

It was after the hay harvest, when there is always a time to stretch yourself and take your

ease—before the corn harvest begins. One day they held games in the Templegarth at Treadholt; men and boys from all the countryside were there. Trestle tables were set out and roofed over with green boughs. The women made a feast and served the tables; and after the feast they had the games. The men had their horse-fighting, swimming-matches and football. The boys must have their football too.

Now Thorgils, who was very strong and active, as well as tall for his years, was left out of the picking-up, and clamoured for a place. The bigger boys scoffed at him and took no more notice; but one of them who had a kind face put a hand on his shoulder, and drew him aside. “ You see, Thorgils,” he said, “ it would be impossible to have you in the game. It would be against the rules.”

“ What rules would it be against? ” Thorgils always went to the point of a thing.

“ Well,” said the other, “ the rule is that you have to be reckoned good of your hands. Now each of us has killed something or other—some very large things. But I’m sure that you never did.”

Thorgils was mortified. It was true, he had never killed anything bigger than a fish—and that hadn't been a big one. "Once I helped hold a pig," he said. "And I did hold, and wouldn't let go."

The boy said, that wouldn't do, and then, being called, ran off to the field. Thorgils moped by himself, and thought of his father. He wouldn't go into the company again for the rest of the day, nor near the house until they had all gone home.

That night he made up his mind that something must die, and that he must kill it. He knew that it must be so directly he woke. He lay broad awake in his bed and looked out of the window at the moon. It was a three-quarter moon, very white and clear. He saw the face in it plainly, and read it as a sorrowful face which yet saw that the thing must be done. He waited a little while longer, clasping his shins, and wondering what it was that he was going to kill. He was very excited about it, and rather sorry for the victim, already doomed, out there in the moonlight with all the other beasts. He thought it would be a bullock. Not a sheep certainly. Nor one of the dogs. Then, all of a

sudden, he thought that he ought to kill something of his own; and then he thought of old Illing. Illing was a grey pack-horse which he was allowed to ride.

That being settled, he slipped out of bed and got down tiptoe into the hall. At the door he took down a spear from the rack, then shot back the bolt and went out. Two of the dogs got up and jumped about him, but he made them go back and lie down.

He went into the straw-yard, and saw the horses huddled together, asleep, but all standing. He saw Illing at once, looking white in the moonlight, like a silver horse. He went first into the byre and took down a halter. Then he went up to Illing and caught him by the forelock. He had some difficulty with the halter, as he was too short by a head for his business; but by standing on the edge of a water-trough he managed the job, and led Illing quietly away.

He took him into an outhouse, and made him stand. He hated the whole thing by this time, but knew that it must be done. So he lifted his spear and drove it in with all his might. Illing

threw his head up and plunged wildly; but even so, he slipped back on his haunches and couldn't get up. He sawed with his head two or three times, and then fell sideways and lay still, breathing deeply. Thorgils stood leaning on his spear until Illing was perfectly still—then he went back to the house. He had no pride in what he had done. It seemed to be a hateful business got over. He went to bed again, and set himself the task of going to sleep—in which he succeeded.

In the morning there was a great to-do. The horses were turned out to grass, and Illing was not to be found. Thorgrim said that he had seen him in the straw-yard overnight, and that he *must* be found. The men went out again to look, and Thorgils, who could not bear the suspense, went with them, and took them into the outhouse. There lay old Illing stiff in his blood. Nothing was said to any purpose until they came back to Thorgrim again. Then Thorgrim said, “Who can have done this?”

“I killed him,” Thorgils said, “last night.”

Thorgrim grew very red. “You killed him? You? What did you do that for, my lad?”

Thorgils told him the reason, and added that the horse was his own.

“ You are wrong there,” said Thorgrim. “ The horse was mine, as everything is here while your mother is alive. Your reason is a foolish one—but it’s all of a piece with the rest of your days here. Now there shall be an end of it. Out you go.”

Thorwen was in the women’s room where the girls were making the beds. She looked through the door, and then came into the hall. “ What has he done now, that you tell him he shall go out? ” Thorgrim told her the whole story. He was very angry, though he didn’t offer to beat Thorgils for it.

“ He has never settled down with me since I came here. I don’t like it and won’t have it. But this is too much, and there shall be no more. I’ll take him over to Loft at Mirehouses and have him fostered there. He’ll be within reach of you if you want to see him, and Loft will do anything for Thord’s son.” Thorwen did not gainsay him; and the end of it was that Thorgils was taken over to Mirehouses that same evening. Mirehouses lies East of Tread-holt, some seven miles nearer to Cogsound.

Loft had been a great friend of Thord and was pleased to have Thorgils.

There he stayed until he was old enough to go abroad.

CHAPTER II

THE DRIVING OF THE THRALLS

THORGILS grew fast and far at Mire-houses, where no check was put upon him, and he was allowed to go very much as he liked. It is a great thing for a boy to be where he is understood. Loft was amused by him, and used to talk to him as if they were both of an age. He called him “kinsman”: “Why, yes, kinsman,” he used to say, and, “I daresay you are right, kinsman.” Loft’s wife was called Reginn, a good woman, who had had misfortunes with her children. None of them were living at this time; so you can understand that Thorgils fared none the worse for that.

Loft always said that his foster son would turn out a paragon. He had a large and free way with him, he said, by which you could tell one who would take on him the handling of

men. For another thing, Thorgils was never two-minded about any job in hand. He always knew what he wanted to do, and what he intended. You can tell by that.

Thorgils himself was aware of it. He told Loft how it was. He said, "You see, Loft, it isn't that *I want to do a thing*; but I know beforehand that it *is going to be done*." "That's it, kinsman," said Loft. "That's the man of action. And you'd do it, I daresay, although you might die for it—and know beforehand that you were going to die for it." But Thorgils had nothing to say to that, because it had never come into his head that he might die one day. Other people died—like his father at sea, or like Illing, his old grey horse—but he couldn't conceive of his own death somehow.

But he was fully nine years old before he could make his friend Loft happy in the certainty of his fame to come. He was then a big and strong boy, good to look at if only because he was so healthy. They had a boat ready for sea, Loft and half a dozen of his people. They were going out beyond the Islands to fish, and it would be a day and night affair before they

had done with it. At the last minute Loft could not go. A great stone of the ballast fell on his foot and broke his ankle. Thorgils begged that he might take his place. He said that he could row as well as any of them. Loft let him go.

It was late in the season, and the weather, none too good at starting, turned squally and cold almost as soon as they were outside the land. But they cast anchor on the good ground and set to work at their fishing. Thorgils let down his line, and had hardly found bottom before he was into a great fish. It was all he could do to hold it, but hold it he did, and brought it up to the side, where one of the men got a hook into it and hauled it inboard. It was a huge flat fish, like a flounder, only much bigger—pinky-white on one side, and brown on the other, with a tail as long as a cow's when the skin is off it. It curled and flacked about all over the place until its head was beaten; and then it died. Nobody caught anything else though they stuck it out through the night; then, when the morning broke stormily, with a choppy sea and heavy sleet showers, they put up anchor and turned for home. Now it was

that Thorgils proved his mettle, for he took an oar and pulled like a man.

Once in harbour, nobody must carry his fish but himself. "Have it your own way, master," said the thralls. There was only one way of doing it, and that was to haul it up the path with a cord passed through the gill; and thus attached Thorgils tugged at his fish with a will. By-and-by the string gets frayed, and presently parts, and pitches Thorgils on to his nose. Then, busying himself with a new attachment, he sees something shinng in the fish's gill. "What's that bright thing inside my fish's head?" They come round him and look. They dig with a knife—a silver ring! "You are to be the lucky man, master," they tell him; and Thorgils takes it quietly. Loft said just the same when the ring was given him to keep for his foster son. He was proud of the lad, knowing what a wind and tide he had had to pull against.

Thorgils was considered as a man after this, and given man's work to do; but it was the driving of the thralls that made him famous all over the country; and that happened before he was twelve years old. There's a track be-

hind Mirehouses which crosses the first ridge of hills and takes you down into a river bottom. Good fishing is to be had in the river, and Thorgils was often there by himself. On the further side of the ridge from Mirehouses, half-way down the hill towards the river, are barrows, where good men have been buried according to custom. It is a lonely place where you rarely meet a soul; but in the valley, about the river on either side, there are pasture fields and certain tilth also where men work in the summertime.

Now Thorgils was coming home late one night from his fishing. It was dusk, but not dark; and as he came up the ridge from the river he thought he saw men standing about one of the barrows. After a time he was sure of it. It was curious, because it had never happened before. Nobody went near the barrows after dark, because you never knew what the dead might do. Sometimes they were not put in right, and grumbled about it; sometimes they were merry and used to sing, sitting up inside the cairn. Sometimes they used to rattle their weapons and call out strange old cries to each other, using names which had been forgotten.

Nobody cared for such things in the dark. But now there were several men about one of the barrows, and very busy with something. Thorgils knew that he must go and see what they were doing there—so he left the path and went. He took care that they should not see him coming.

By using the cover of other barrows he came within easy sight of them. They were thralls, and there were five of them. One had a pick, one a spade. One stood and looked about; and two others were kneeling beside the barrow where two were at work.

Thorgils watched them for a long time, very excited. He guessed now that they were going to rob the dead man inside, and knew that he must stop them. But he thought it better to wait until he could take them red-handed. They had nothing as yet, though they were a long way in. He thought also, that if they did get anything he would take it from them and give it to Loft. Loft could do what he pleased with it afterwards.

By this time it was almost dark, and Thorgils was able to stand up within stone-throwing distance of the thralls. In any case they were

at the climax of their job, and much too intent on what they were about to have any regard for him. The man with the shovel withdrew himself from the tunnel he had cleared: immediately another of them threw himself down and crawled into the hole head first. He came out with something in his hands, which they all looked at. Then he went in again and remained a good time. He brought back more treasure. They all huddled together and bickered over it. That was the time for Thorgils.

He came down on them like a squall, and they scattered and fell all ways. "On your knees, on your knees!" They took to their knees. "Now hand over," said Thorgils. Without a word to say, the silver was handed up to him—for it was all silver—arm-rings and a chain, and a large cup without handles. Thorgils, who was unknown to them,—for they were not thralls of Mirehouses—cut up his line into lengths and bound their hands behind them. Not a man of them stirred, and not one had anything to say. "Up, now, all of you," said Thorgils; and they stood up. So then he drove them over the moor and on to the track, like a flock of sheep, guiding them with his fishing-

pole, and brought them down to Mirehouses. He had trouble with them once; for when they found out whither he was driving them, one of them guessed who he was, and tried to run for it. But Thorgils was too quick for him, and cut him over the head with his pole. The others stopped meekly while their mate fell into his place again. So he brought them into the garth and had them all heaped together at the door when Loft came to open it. They were roped to each other and tied up for the night, and driven home next day to the place they came from. There was nearly three pounds-weight of silver altogether, which Loft kept. But the report of Thorgils' deed went all over the country, and he was considered a champion. Scarleg, his stepfather, now wanted him home again, for his wife said to him, "You see what has come of it. If Thorgils had stopped here you would have had that treasure for yourself. Now Loft has it, as is right enough."

So Scarleg made up to Thorgils and asked him to come back; but Thorgils said that he was well off where he was, and should certainly stay with Loft. He used to go over to see his mother now and then, and took an in-

erest in her child by Scarleg, his half-brother, who was called Haering; but he was never the same to her since she had allowed him to be fostered at Mirehouses.

CHAPTER III

THE SWORD CALLED BLADE

WHEN the time was come, which was when Thorgils was full-grown, he told Loft that he should like to go abroad. Loft said he had expected as much—“ and I think you will give a good account of yourself wherever you go.” There was certainly every sign of it about him. He was tall and broad-chested; a very fair young man, yellow-haired, with a high colour and blue eyes. Loose in the limbs, as if the ligatures were not set, for all that he was active and most supple, a good swimmer and a great-hearted young man. He was by no means quarrelsome, and had never yet come to grips with anybody with any notion but sport in his head. Yet men obeyed him readily when he spoke sharply and as if he meant it, and to be sure he had not matched himself with adventurers outside his little world. Now, however, he was to go.

He went in a ship from Cogsound which was bound for Norway, the intention in his head being to take service under Earl Haakon who then ruled there; but things did not turn out quite as he expected. Head winds which opened out into North-easterly gales drove them out of their course, and they fared too far to the South for Trondjhem, which they had aimed at. After much tossing and drifting about they made out a coast-line some three weeks after sailing, and hailed a long-ship which came across their course. She waited for them—a black ship with shields hung along her gunwale, a large company of fighting men on board, and an Earl sitting on the after-deck, a fine figure of a man.

This was Earl Eric Thorwaldsson, called, and very properly called, Eric the Red—for he was as red as a red boar, and not unlike one—with his little angry eyes, shining tusks, and great chops covered with coarse hair. Yet a conversable man, very friendly so soon as he made out whom he had to deal with. He agreed to let the Icelanders bear him company, for he said that he was bound for Norway too, and should look to them to bear a hand if he

met any of his unfriends. "Likely enough I shall," he said, "and men who would make their profit of me, for I am outlawed at this time, and don't care who knows it." It appeared that he had taken a man's wife from him and had her still, and again that he had killed a chieftain called Waltheow by starting an avalanche to fall on his house. He took rather a fancy to Thorgils and would have had him in his service, but Thorgils said that he had intended to see Earl Haakon first, and should do so. "There's time enough," he said, and Eric said that was a good answer at Thorgils' age, though not so good at his own!

After that they fell in with a Danish ship, and there was a battle. They got alongside and bound the ships together. Then they fought on one or the other as the tide of battle turned. Eric was like a man inspired; he was like a bersark, singing all the time at the top of his voice, laying about him with a long bill, and yet foreseeing every turn in the game like a goal-keeper at a football-match. Thorgils behaved with great coolness, standing high on the poop with a long bow and two bundles of arrows. He made very good shooting, and was

aimed at repeatedly by the Danes, who found him dangerous. He should, by all odds, have been killed half a dozen times; but nothing touched him, and he did not leave his post until he had shot away all his arrows. Then with a young man of Eric's ship—a young man called Eadwine—he cleared the decks of Danes, and got hurt in the calf by a wounded man who tried to hamstring him.

As for Earl Eric, somebody chopped at him and took off his forefinger. He stooped and picked it up. "My old finger? Take it, you greedy swine;" and he threw it at his assailant and hit him in the eye with it. "There's for you, and here's for you." He hewed him down before he could see what was coming next.

They got a great booty off that ship, and went on their course; but the Icelanders persisted in making Trondjhem because Earl Haakon would be there, which was precisely Earl Eric's reason for not going thither. When they parted company Eadwine said that he should go with Thorgils. They had mixed their blood and sworn everlasting friendship. Eric made a long face when he heard about it—"I'll

have you both one of these days," he said, "but I suppose I must lose you now. You youngsters take these things to heart. Now, Thorgils," he said, "remember you are to come to me when I send for you." Thorgils promised.

I haven't much to say about Thorgils in Norway, as he was there for a short time only. He didn't care for Earl Haakon, who, being near the end of his tether, had fallen into bad ways, what with women and wine. So he and Eadwine, like-minded with him, spent their time looking about for likelier company. They found a ship which was going to Scotland, made their proposals and were accepted. This ship belonged to a chieftain of Caithness named Anlaf, and was going home. On board her was a rather notable Viking, called Swart, which was his real name, and also Ironhead, which was the name of his nature. Swart said that he was going over to get Anlaf's sister in marriage, but that he shouldn't stay very long. "I'll take the woman and all I can get with her, and then I shall go to England," he said, "where I can do better." He talked very big, but nobody paid much attention to him. Ead-

wine said he was a bersark. Thorgils shrugged his shoulders. "He talks bersark," he said, "yet I am thinking he could be dealt with by a man of his hands."

Well, the short of the matter is that they made a good run of it, and were well received by Earl Anlaf—all of them, that is, except Swart Ironhead, who was not so welcome. Eadwine admired Gudrun, the sister of Anlaf, and saw as much of her as he could. Thorgils was not so sure about her; but women did not stand for much with him. The difficulty was with the lady, a tall and handsome girl, who said that no earthly power would bring her to marry Swart. She said that in full hall when she was sitting on the dais. It was a great insult, and Swart fumed over it. Earl Anlaf, a jolly, easy-tempered sort of man, tried to laugh it off; but Swart wouldn't have it and said that a bargain had been made. "And I intend to hold you to it, Earl," he said, "and to have recompense for an open insult. So now I challenge you to single battle on the holm, and the sooner the better."

Earl Anlaf said that Gudrun, his sister, was within her rights in refusing the man, and that

he should be within the rights of an oldish man in refusing his battle. "And I don't doubt," he said, "that I shall find a blade to meet yours, and, as you say, the sooner the better." There the matter ended for the time; but afterwards Thorgils went to Earl Anlaf and told him that he was ready to meet Swart on the holm—"and as soon as he please."

"Why do you offer yourself?" said the Earl.

Thorgils answered, "Because I dislike Swart and should be glad of a smack at him. And because I think Gudrun should do as she pleases with herself. And because I should like to put in a word for her afterwards."

"Would you indeed?" says the Earl. "This is news. Why, she is five years older than you, and a notable match."

"We can talk about all that afterwards," said Thorgils. "One thing at a time is the best plan." Anlaf agreed to have him as his champion.

Thorgils talked it over with his friend Eadwine, who said that it would be a good battle, and a fine thing to put Swart out of the way. "He's a bad one," Eadwine said, "but don't

suppose that he will shirk hard blows. That's not the way of it. But I'll tell you this about him. He believes that he can only be killed by a certain sword, which is here in the house; and whenever he fights he asks his enemy, Has he the sword called Blade? And if he maintains that he has, he won't fight. Now wait for me here while I go and fetch Blade."

Presently he returned with the sword. "Now," said Eadwine, "here is your plan. Thrust Blade into the sand when you come to the holm where the ground is marked out. If Swart asks you about it, say that you don't know that its hilt is above the earth. That will satisfy him and be no lie."

"Good," said Thorgils.

So it fell out. Swart asked his question before they went to work, and Thorgils answered as it had been agreed upon. They faced each other; but at the moment of joining battle, Thorgils dropped his own sword, stooped and pulled up Blade out of the sand. He did that so quickly that Swart didn't see what he was about.

They fought fiercely for a while without advantage either way, but presently Thorgils

saw his chance and hewed off the tail of Swart's shield. Swart gave a deep groan and fell. Then they found that his left leg was off too, a clean cut through the thigh. Then Thorgils cut off the man's head, and that was the end of Swart.

In the flush of victory Thorgils now did what he had not intended, that is, he determined to have Gudrun for himself. His first thought, when he undertook Anlaf's battle for him, had been to hand her over to Eadwine, who was in love with her and wanted her badly. But now he had changed his mind. He was not in love with Gudrun, but he intended to have her. So he spoke for her with her brother Anlaf, who really had nothing to say against it. Whatever Thorgils' fortune may have been in Iceland, he was now a rich man; for the law of the holm was that the goods of the beaten fell to the conqueror. Here he stood then, master of three or four ships with their companies and a store of goods beside. Therefore Anlaf, after a word or two with Gudrun, who was willing, contracted her to Thorgils, and they were to be married at short notice.

But now Eadwine wanted to have Blade

back, and Thorgils was not so ready. "That's a rarely good sword," he said. "I would as soon give you my wife as that sword." Eadwine said that it did not belong to either of them, and that he must by all means put it back in the house. "But," he said, "I believe you will find a good sword before you go." Then Thorgils gave him back Blade, and made the best of it.

He stayed in Caithness through the winter, and next summer there was a foray into Ireland. The marriage was to be when they returned. It was in Ireland that he found the sword of which Eadwine had dreamed and told him. That sword must have a chapter to itself, for it lived as long as Thorgils did—and longer.

CHAPTER IV.

EARTH-HOUSE-PREY

THEY pulled out from Wick, two ships, and hoisted their sails, with a fair wind from the N. N. E. They headed for the open sea and laid a straight course for the ocean. The wind held them throughout, and blew on their quarter when they shifted to a more southerly course. After a week at sea they made the land, and ran into a deep bay of black rock, with islands dotted about it like sleeping whales. Flocks of sea-birds were here, which flickered in the air like snow when they drew in. The coast seemed to be uninhabited, and they saw no men when they ran ashore and beached their ships. One of these was Thorgils' own; he had thirty fighting men, who had been Swart's, but were now answerable to him only. Eadwine commanded the other ship.

They divided. Eadwine and his company

took the shore and went harrying; Thorgils left a sufficiency of men with the ships and took the remnant with him. He would go inland to see what was to be seen.

It was forest country, he found out. Atop of the cliffs the woods began within half a mile of the sea, and had no visible ending on any side. They found little to reward them for their pains, and were hard put to it to get food. Sometimes they were shot at from the trees, but could not see who sped the bolts. Now and again they came upon the remains of fire; but no houses or stockaded towns, and no herds or flocks.

They wandered about without any sure sense of direction for more than a week. Then they came to a clearing in the forest, where there was a heath, and a black pool of water with reeds on all sides of it. Trees were dotted about sparsely, here and there. They saw an oak tree standing by itself, bare of leaves, while all the other trees were in the new green of summer.

They looked at this tree for a long time, and walked about it. "There is some meaning in it," Thorgils said. "Either it is rooted deep

into something poisonous, and has died so, or it has no root at all. Now I believe that the latter is the true state of the case."

One of them climbed the tree and fastened a rope round the top of it. They hauled on the rope, and the tree began to rock. After some time of hauling and rocking, down she came with a crash. She was hollow; and the ground below her was hollow. Thorgils looked in the hole, and in the dark saw bright eyes fixed upon him. He counted five pair, but thought there might be more.

He called his men about him. "There are earth-dwellers under our tree," he said. "I don't know how many—but a number. Now we will make a bargain to share what they may have stored down there; but we will say, and take an oath upon it, that the first man down shall take three portions, and the second man down two portions, and after that the remaining portions shall be put together and redivided, so that the others share equally in them. Is that agreed?" They said "Yes." "Very well," said Thorgils. "Then here's for three shares." With that he jumped into the hole, and chanced it.

There was a great hollow place down there, and a mighty to-do when Thorgils was in it. Three men jumped on him at once, and he felt claws at work on his legs—but there were many who kept out of his way, for he could hear whistling breath and fierce whisperings in the dark. He had a short-handled axe in his hand, and killed two of his assailants outright. The third had him round the neck and his teeth fastened into his shoulder. But Thorgils was very tough in the neck, and having his left hand free, managed to get his knife out of his belt. With that he drove in under his man's ribs, and so finished him. Then he called up to the daylight. “Ho, there, come down, some of you, and clear out this den with me.” Two or three men jumped down and stood with Thorgils in the middle, where the light fell. No other attacks were made.

Presently a man of theirs jumped down with a torch made of heather which he had contrived to light with a flint-stone and his axe; and with that to help them they cleared the hole. Besides the three dead men they found fifteen more persons—one a very old man with eyebrows so long that they hid his eyes, and

finger-nails like a bird's claws, other men of valid age, very sullen and frightened, women with children at the breast, girls and boys, and two or three youths with hair as black as crows and dark-blue eyes. Some of the girls were handsome—all of them pale, with black hair. There was some treasure, gold and silver, of which Thorgils kept two rings for himself; and there was a sword of blue steel, very finely tempered, with a strange light upon it. It was wrapt up in a blue cloak, but shone in the dark when he held it up. “Here's the sword which was promised me,” Thorgils said. “This shall be my third portion, and I want nothing else. I shall call this sword Earth-house-prey, and men shall remember it in days to come. The rest we will share, except this old man who is no use to anybody. Him I will leave behind in his hole—and he shall have a girl to look after him.”

That was how they did it, and led away all the rest of the earth-dwellers, dividing them up among themselves.

There was little else to be got out of this shaggy and desert country; so they made the best of their way back, found Eadwine and his

party waiting for them by the shore—with cattle and a few captives—and ran the ships out to sea again.

When they were home in Caithness Thorgils said that he should go home to Iceland. "I have an estate out there," he told Anlaf, "in none too good keeping. I think it time to cast my eye over it."

"But you are to marry my sister, I believe," Anlaf said. Thorgils said that he should not go on with it.

"We are not suited to each other," he said. "She don't care very much for me, nor I for her, to be plain with you. If you are willing, I will hand her over to Eadwine, who is fond of her, and will treat her well. He was in love with her from the first, which I was not, though I felt, just after the battle, that I might have made something of it."

"Well," Anlaf said, "I think you are treating me badly. You should not hand a man's sister about as if she was a bale of goods."

"Far from that," Thorgils said, "I am working to make her happy. She would never be so with me. If you are willing we will ask Eadwine what he thinks—and her too."

Anlaf was brought round to it, the more especially as Gudrun was more than willing. So that was settled. Eadwine said it was very handsomely done by Thorgils; and after mid-summer Thorgils went home.

A good deal had happened while he was away. He found Loft in charge of Treadholt, for Thorwen his mother was dead, his brother Thorleik had gone abroad, and as for Scarleg his stepfather and Haering his half-brother, they had flitted to Stock-Eyre and were settled out there.

Thorgils told Loft that he should stay at home for a while, and Loft said it was a good thing. "You are a great man now, and ought to hold your own. There's a new-comer from the North settled in these parts, and seems minded to take things with a high hand. We need a man like you."

"How is he called, your new man?"

"Asgrim is his name—Asgrim Ellida-Grimsson. Something of a tyrant, I believe."

"Well, we will see what we can make of him," said Thorgils.

CHAPTER V.

THOREY AND GUDRUN

EVERYBODY in the country was glad to see Thorgils again. They made feasts for him and cried his name up to the skies. And all said the same thing, that now he was come to live at home, it was his business to enforce the rights of the first settlers, and not allow a rich man like Asgrim Ellida-Grimsson to roughride his neighbours because he had a large following. He used to ride thirty and sometimes forty to the Thing and cow a man down by threats and loud conversation. Nobody liked that, and there was much feeling in the country about it. And again it was said—and Loft said it often—that he ought to marry. He was quite ready for that, he told Loft, if he could find a woman to suit him. Loft said “Ride over to Calfholt and see what you think of Thorey, Thorward’s daughter.”

Thorgils said that he certainly would. "But what is she doing at Calfholt?"

"She is fostered there. Thorward is dead and Thorfinna her mother minds the house for her son. So Thorey is with Iostan of Calfholt and happy all day long."

"Is she a pretty girl—or what would you call her?"

"I should call her a fine girl," Loft said, "and you might trust her to your death-day. There's another girl there, Gudrun, her foster sister. They are bosom-friends; but Gudrun is not for your way of living."

"Well, I'll go over one day," said Thorgils.

So he did, crossing the fell by the path where he had seen the thralls rifling the grave long ago, fording the river and climbing half-way up the second ridge. Calfholt lay there very snugly under a shingle roof, with a grove of birches on the weather side. It was afternoon when he reached the first enclosures, and the men were out in the meadows. No dogs greeted him. He saw two girls sitting on the threshold of the house, with a basin between them. They were strigging berries, and made a good contrast. One had hair much fairer than her skin, which

was flushed like a pink apple. Her hair was flaxen-white, and very long, in a single plait down her back. The other was of pale complexion, with vivid red in her cheeks. She had dark hair, which looked black. Thorgils wondered which was which. He saw the fair girl look up at the sound of horse-hoofs. The other took no notice. "The dark one is Thorey," he said to himself.

When he came up to them with a greeting, they both rose; the fair one first. He asked if Iostan was at home, or expected. He was getting in the corn, the fair girl told him, and would not be in till supper-time, which would be late.

"My mother is in the house," she said then. "I'll go and fetch her to you." Thorgils thanked her and sat down by the other girl. He had made up his mind that it was Gudrun who had gone for her mother, and was sorry about it, because he liked her best. When she got up to go he had noticed that she was tall and deep-chested, and thought that she walked well, swinging one arm freely by her side.

Meantime he helped Thorey, as he supposed, to strig raspberries, and talked to her. She gave him good answers. He thought that she

would make a pleasant sister-in-law, but judged that she was used to men's company, and perhaps rather more fond of it than she need.

Presently the fair girl came back and saw what he was doing. Her eyes, very blue eyes, laughed, but she hardly smiled with her mouth. "My mother begs you in," she said. "She says that you are very welcome to her."

Thorgils stared. "But if she hasn't seen me come," he said, "how can she know whether I am welcome or not?"

"I told her your name," the girl said.

"And how did you know my name, pray?" said Thorgils. She grew rather hot, and the other answered for her.

"We both knew you as soon as you came into the garth. You are Thorgils, of Tread-holt."

Thorgils laughed. "You know more of me than I know of you at present," he said. "I shall be glad to see your mother." Then he went into the house, and Thorgerd, who was Iostan's wife, and own mother of one of the girls, made him welcome.

He agreed to stay until Iostan came in with his sons, which they did when the sun rested on

the top of Eyjafell. Iostan had two sons, Col and Starkad, both fine young men, and both inclined to be dark-hued. That set Thorgils puzzling again, for their colouring was very much that of the girl he had decided to be Thorey. Iostan himself, a well-to-do farmer, knew all about Treadholt and the fame of its new master, and it may well be that he knew what Thorgils was come after. However, he said nothing; and when he had washed himself the girls brought the meat in, and served the table as the custom was.

Thorgils watched them both carefully and felt himself falling in love with the flaxen-haired girl. But if she were Gudrun and daughter of the house, it would not be a good match for him. No matter for that; she was the better of the two, for quite apart from her beauty and carriage, which were beyond cavil the finer, she held herself with more gravity, and never forgot what she was about, whereas the little one's eyes were all over the place, and she was a great talker, that was evident. She had a sleek way of smiling, as if to herself, at her own thoughts—but really, he judged, for the puzzlement of the world about her. “She's what you call a

rogue," he thought, " or a rascal if you are angry. She would be a handful rather than an armful. Give me a grave girl for a wife."

After supper they sat on the benches beside the house, the evening being fine and warm. Thorgils told the franklin what his errand was. Iostan said that he had thought as much. " You will be wanting a wife, as is reasonable," he said, " and if I say that you may find one here, you'll not take it amiss. Those are fine girls, the pair of them, and as fond of one another as two beans in a pod."

Thorgils said, not a doubt of it; and then Iostan asked him which of them he had thought about. " I own that Thorey is the better match for you," he went on. " She's of a greater family than mine, and has more gear to her name, though I will do as much for my Gudrun as any man may for his daughter."

Thorgils now said that he had made up his mind. He went straight to the goal, as his habit was.

" I don't know which is your Gudrun and which is your fosterling," he said, " but that makes no odds to me. A man ought to know what woman he wants to marry, and so I do. I

choose for the fair one of those two girls of yours—and now you shall tell me whose daughter she is."

Iostan slapped his knee. "Like to like," he said. "You have chosen for Thorey."

"Why, I thought I had picked out your Gudrun," said Thorgils, colouring up.

"Not at all, master," said Iostan. "We don't breed that colour in my family. No, no. That is Thorward's daughter, and her mother is Thorfinna of Ord, who will have to be asked about it—though it's all one about that. Now I will fetch the girl presently and you shall ask her yourself, but all being settled so far as you are concerned, I don't mind telling you now that you've chosen the better of the two. That is a great-hearted girl who will never fail you. Now mine is a good girl enough, and a sweet-natured, wholesome girl—but she's fond of fun, and that's a fact. We have had a little trouble now and then, and there might be a little more on the way. Nothing wrong, you understand—but there, she's young and fond of attention. And as sharp as a needle, too. It is an odd thing, though, that you should have chosen Thorey and thought you had Gudrun." Then he went off

to find the girls and left Thorgils alone. He himself did not think it at all odd.

Presently Iostan came back. Thorey was with him, walking gravely by his side.

"Thorey," said Iostan, "Thorgils here has asked for you, and there's no better man in the country. He has approved himself abroad, and will be a great champion, as we all know. Now what will you say to him?"

She turned her eyes upon Thorgils, and they were very steady. Then she gave him her hand without a word, and he took it, and kissed her. "You knew me before I knew you," he said.

Thorey said, "I knew you before you came into the home-field."

"Was it Gudrun saw me first, or you?"

"It was Gudrun," she said, "who saw you first, but it was I who knew you first."

"How was that?" said Thorgils. "How could you know a man you had never seen?"

She blushed. "I had heard of you often," she said, "and it seemed to me that you were like your doings." Thorgils laughed.

The upshot of it was a plighting, and a marriage. They set up house at Treadholt and were happy in each other: as the book says,

“they fared together very well.” There was no meeting so far with Asgrim Ellida-Grims-son, who was heard of in the country as keeping a great train and carrying things with a high hand at assemblies. Thorgils also had a good company about him; and it was believed that he would uphold any one who was put upon by Asgrim. But Thorgils was one who never made trouble.

CHAPTER VI

GUDRUN'S AFFAIR

BUT nevertheless there was trouble next summer, and Thorgils was not surprised to hear that Gudrun was mixed up in it. It seems that a man named Sorle, who lived not far from Calfholt, was much taken with Gudrun. He was a rough-and-tumble, strong man, with not a great quantity of brains. He could have done the thing properly if he had chosen—I mean he could have seen Iostan, he could have spoken for the girl according to the customs of his country and people; but he did not. Instead he used to come up to Calfholt at all hours of the day, sit on the turf wall of the garth, kick his heels there, and whistle between his teeth. If Gudrun came out of the house on her affairs he looked hard at her. If she spoke to him, he answered shortly; if she said nothing, he went on whistling between his teeth.

Now this may or may not have been agreeable to the girl herself, and, custom of country

or no-custom of country, girls have nothing to say against admiration; but a girl is considered to be disgraced by behaviour of the sort. Gudrun's parents were much offended, and her two brothers angry. So one evening when Col, the younger of the brothers, but the most mettlesome, came home and saw the two together, he sent Gudrun into the house and had a word or two with Sorle. " You are doing wrong to our family, Sorle, and I wish you would stop it," he said.

Sorle asked him what he meant, and put Col in a heat. " You know very well what I mean. You know that a man doesn't come and hang about a house all day, and talk to a girl alone. You will get her made a by-word, and it's a great scandal. So will you stop it or not? "

Sorle looked very doggedly at the hillside over Col's head and went on whistling.

" Do you hear what I say? " Col asked him in a fume. And then Sorle stopped whistling and looked at him.

" I hear you. I shall do what seems good to me," he said. " Your high words or by-words make no difference to me. So there's for you."

Col seemed to hover over him, as if he

might do something besides talk. Then he thought better of it. "Have it as you please," he said, and turned on his heel.

Next day, there was Sorle again on the wall, but Gudrun was not to be seen. Col would not go into supper, but stayed in the porch watching his enemy. When it grew as near dark as it would be, Sorle got off the wall, stretched himself and turned to go down the fellside. Col followed him at a good pace. He had a bill in his hand.

Sorle did not look back or hurry himself even when he heard rapid steps behind him. Presently Col drew level with him, and Sorle glanced sideways to see who it was. He was still whistling between his teeth. Not a word was said between them, but by-and-by Col lifted his bill and hit Sorle in the neck a great blow. He fell like a stone and never moved again. Col laid him out in the pathway and the bill upon him, and went home.

Gudrun was waiting for him though she did not say so, or indeed say anything until he did. Col said, "I have settled an old affair this evening. You won't be troubled with Sorle's company from this night onwards."

Gudrun said, "His coming was nothing to me, so his going will be nothing; but perhaps you know that he was a thing-man of Asgrim Ellida-Grimsson's and a close friend of his."

If Col had known it, he hadn't thought of it. He shrugged his shoulders, but said nothing. Gudrun took the conversation in hand and told him what to do. "I advise you to go to Treadholt as soon as you can, and get help from Thorgils. He can hardly refuse you, I think, and will be a great strength to us if there is a law-suit about this or any reprisal. You don't want the house burned, I suppose, or to be made an outlaw for a block of wood like Sorle." Col said nothing, but intended to go.

Shortly afterwards, in the evening, somebody knocked at the door of Treadholt. Thorey opened it and was pleased to see her foster brother. "Come in, Col," she said. "The men are at table and I am going to serve them this moment."

Col was out of breath and said that he couldn't come in. Thorey looked quickly at him. "What is it? What have you done?"

"I can't come in until I have told you what

brings me," he said; and then he told her the truth.

Thorey listened, and looked serious; but she did not seem angry. "I'll do what I can," she said, "and when I can; but it won't be easy with Thorgils. He'll make up his mind for himself, and as soon as he knows what the matter is. You had better go behind the hall curtains and wait there. I cannot speak to him about it until bedtime." Col took her advice.

Thorey went back into the hall and Thorgils leaned out of the high seat and took her by the arm. "What have you done with the meat, my child? What is it all about?" She laughed and said that it was all ready.

But still Thorgils was looking at her. "I never saw you with such red cheeks—or not since I saw you first," he said. "Now there's something in this."

"A wise man knows his own wife," she said; "but the wife knows more of the fire than the wisest man. Let me go, and you shall have your supper."

That was all until bedtime; but then she came and sat by him and told him the truth. Thorgils heard her without interrupting. "That is how

it stands now at Calfholt," she said. " Will you please to help them? Will you do it for my sake? "

Thorgils gave her a kiss. " I will do it for your sake, and for Col's sake too. He is a fine fellow, and everybody speaks well of him. Let him go to bed now, and come to bed yourself—and to-morrow I'll go to Calfholt."

And this was what he did. He rode up to Calfholt early in the morning; and found them very much perturbed. They hailed him gladly; but he took it all as a matter of course. He took Iostan apart and told him what he proposed.

" You shall all flit over to Treadholt, where there is plenty of room for you. You had better begin at once. Set the women to work indoors, and do you and the thralls round up the live stock. You will have Asgrim here before the day is over. Burn what you can't take away, or he'll have it. He will sue Col's outlawry at the Thing, I don't doubt—but that is some way off yet. Now do you as I advise, and don't be long about it either." Iostan thanked him heartily. " I don't suppose you understand what a help you are being to me and mine," he said; but Thorgils answered him, " Few words are best."

Gudrun, who had always been rather afraid of Thorgils, kept out of his way, making herself very busy in the house; but his eye caught hers in the course of the morning, and she came up to receive punishment. He did not say very much to her. "You had a good deal to do with this, I fancy, but you didn't know what you were bringing about. I daresay you think it rather fine to have men shedding blood for your sake—but it's a bad way of getting a husband and a household of your own. Now you are coming to live with Thorey there must be no more sheeps-eyeing with the likes of Sorle." Gudrun said that she hadn't done anything. "No," said Thorgils, "you did nothing; but you allowed things to be done which were not convenient."

The stock was off the homestead before dinner-time, and the household gear was brought over on horseback before they took anything to eat. After dinner they fired the stacks. Thorgils with some of his people remained to see that done, and while they were in the midst of the smother they heard horses come into the croft, and then saw weapons shining. There seemed to be a good many men there; but Thorgils took

no notice. He had Earth-house-prey with him, and his men all had weapons.

One or two faces looked through the smoke, but it was some time before anybody came up.

By-and-by a man walked his horse through, heading a troop of some half a dozen more. He was a broad-shouldered, round-faced, brown-bearded man, with a scarlet cloak over his shoulders, thrown back to leave his arm free. He wore a metal helm with wings to it, and looked to be a man of forty or thereabouts. He and Thorgils just looked at each other, but not for very long.

Then the stranger said, "There has been a flitting here."

"Yes," said Thorgils, "it looks very much like that."

"And reason good," said the other, "by what I hear."

"Nobody leaves home without a cause," said Thorgils.

After a little the stranger asked him, "Might you know where the folk have gone?" Thorgils said that he couldn't say.

"You mean that you won't say?"

"I mean what I do say," said Thorgils.

“ Well,” said the stranger, “ we shall know soon enough whether Master Col is lucky in his friends.” Thorgils made no answer to that.

The stranger did not know what to do next; but felt that he must do something. His men behind him, no doubt, expected it of him.

“ You are Thorgils, Scarleg’s stepson, are you not? ”

“ They call me Thorgils of Treadholt in these days,” said Thorgils.

“ And Iostan here was a friend of yours? ”

“ He is a friend of mine.”

“ And you stay here? ”

“ I stay here.”

The stranger stared at him for a little while longer, then dug his horse in the flank and turned him sharply. His men made way for him, and he said something to them as he went through; but Thorgils did not hear what it was. They all rode off.

Afterwards he was told that the man in the red cloak was Asgrim Ellida-Grimsson. He said that he had thought as much.

The next time he met that fine man was at the Thing. He himself rode thither with a great following; he had forty-five men with him, all

armed. Asgrim came with forty men, and there was a great suit set in motion for the outlawry of Col. Thorgils took no part in it, but acted as if he knew nothing at all about it. So Asgrim carried his suit, and Col was outlawed for manslaughter. Thorgils rode home again and told them the news. By his advice, and under his protection, Col did not leave the country, but behaved as if there was nothing against him. He went about with Thorgils to all the meetings of that spring and summer, but with such force at hand that Asgrim did not care to do anything. The whole of the country took sides, and there were affrays here and there, which made some of them timid, who lived in lonely places. Iostan himself didn't much like it, and told Thorgils that he would pay for the slaughter sooner than strifes and divisions should go on. Thorgils said that he couldn't prevent him, but that no money need be paid on his account.

However, money was finally paid by the people of the country both for the slaughter of Sorle and the inlawing of Col. It was paid, and Asgrim took it. He asked, Had Thorgils paid anything? No, they said, Thorgils had refused

to pay. “He will pay one of these days,” said Asgrim, “and will have to pay dear.” This was told to Thorgils, as such things always are told. Thorgils was angry that any money had been paid at all. “The man terrifies you by his broad shoulders and great words. He is like a young cuckoo, and you are the wagtails who quest all over the garths to find stuff for his maw and stop his squawking. Like enough you will pay dear—but you will get no money out of me to fill him up.”

So Col was inlawed, Iostan went home to Calfholt, and there was peace in the country; but Asgrim was always girding against Thorgils and saying what would be done to him if he didn’t mind what he was about.

CHAPTER VII

THORSDOOM

THEY say that when Christendom was carried into Iceland, Thorgils heard of it and was one of the first to accept of it. I don't know how that may be, for the books make out that Thorwald Codransson and a Bishop called Frederick brought it into the Northmen's Quarter first of all, and that it did not come South for a year or more after that.

Let that be as it may, it was preached to the Southland men in due season, and Thorgils went to hear what was said. He had always been a religious man; Thor's priest and Thor's temple knew that, for he gave liberally every year when he was at home, and they had come to count on him for a good portion of their livelihood. But now, being at the Thing, where the preaching was to be, he went to hear it and to see what was done. Most of the great men were there, and Asgrim Ellida-Grimsson among

them. He and Thorgils spoke to each other when they met now, but never had much to say.

The preaching was on a hill-top near the Thing-stead, and they had made an altar up there, where the Bishop burned incense, and said mass in his robes. They sang the canticles in Latin too, and praised God thereby. After that a chieftain preached, not the Bishop, because he had not the language of the people. Thorgils gave him great attention, and was thoughtful when he had said what he had to say.

There was much conversation afterwards. Thorgils said that it seemed to him a good religion, and much more reasonable than the old one. "You have to pay for what you get," he said. "That is a law of the world. But it costs me nothing to give a bullock here and there to Thor, whereas it might cost me an inordinate deal to have to take thought what I did, or what I said, or what I imagined. But if the thing you gain is worth the price—how then! A man is a fool not to pay it."

Asgrim said it was all a parcel of lies; but Thorgils replied that you could only tell that by finding out. "You know no more about it

than I do," he said. " And how can you say that it is made up of lies, or I that it is sooth, until we try it? It sounds likely to me."

After that he went to see the Bishop and his friends to find out just what he had to do if he became a Christian. They told him that he must love his neighbour. " Well," he said, " I bear no ill-will to anybody, but I like some men better than others." " No harm in that," he was told, " but you must love nobody worse than you do yourself." " Ah," says Thorgils, " you mean that I must give them equal measure?" " That's it." Thorgils said that he could do that. " And what else do you expect of me?" Then they expounded the Christian doctrine as they understood it themselves, and Thorgils listened attentively. He said that he would think about it, but wished to know what became of Thor and the rest of the old gods. " You don't kill the gods by setting up another one," he said. " No," he was answered, " that may be. But you find out that they are not what you thought them, no friends of yours. Now we say that they are malignant, and think them probably fiends." Thorgils said, " A bad name will hang a dog, and may do a man harm;

but I should like to know what Thor would think of being called a fiend." "No matter what he thinks," they said. "But if you become a Christian you cease to serve Thor or to pay any attention to him—and he won't like it." "I'm sure he will not," said Thorgils.

He talked it over with his friends, saying that he was inclined towards it. It seemed reasonable, he thought. The old faith had grown up by degrees, nobody knew how; one thing had brought about another until now there was a great stack of doctrine in front of your door, so high that you couldn't see the weather. But here was a new thing all compact and sizeable. You can handle it and estimate it. It seemed to fit in with experience—which the old doctrine did not.

The end of it was that he chose to be christened, and was followed into the water by four or five chieftains. Asgrim Ellida-Grimsson was not one of them at this time. After them a number of their friends and dependents went. Loft was one, and Iostan another. Then they rode home, and when the Bishop was handy to Treadholt, Thorey was christened, and Gudrun her foster sister with her. Thorey had given

birth to her first child by this time, a girl; and she was christened Thorny.

These were great things, and greatly resented by Thor's priest and, as it seems, by Thor himself. Thorgils had dreams about Thor. One night he seemed to wake out of his good sleep; there stood a big man by the bedside, twinkling his heavy eyes at him. Thorgils thought that he lay looking at the apparition, not saying anything, but guessing in his heart that this was Thor.

Thor spoke to him in a heavy and grumbling voice: "What have you done, and by what advice, to leave me in the lurch and treat me with indignity? When I trusted in you, then you failed me. But you will have the worst of the battle, for I have a long memory; and it will go hard with you before I have done."

"God will help me," Thorgils said—or so he thought. Then he turned over and went to sleep again, and when he awoke in the morning, though he tried, he could not remember what had been said.

The first thing he was told when he went out of doors was that his boar was dead—found so in the yard. He could see no marks on him, no

sign of disease; but he had the animal buried, would not allow him to be cut up, or have any use made of him.

He told nobody about his dream, and passed over the matter of the boar's death. But he dreamed again before many days, and again of Thor. This time Thor looked like Eric the Red, with the same snarling mouth showing red under his beard, and the same little blinking, angry eyes. "You know me," the dream said, "and you know that I could as easily choke you as your old hog. Look to yourself, then; for you and I have long accounts to settle."

"God will settle our accounts, Thor," was the answer of Thorgils, and Thor said, "See to your beasts," before he disappeared.

Sure enough, he lost a bullock, which all of a sudden began to stand and stare, and tremble all over, with the sweat shining on his coat. Then he pitched head forward on to his head, and there was an end of him. They buried him beside the boar. Thorgils said that some enemy was abroad with a grudge against him, and that he should sit up with the cattle for a night or two. And so he did. What happened nobody knew, for he wouldn't tell; but Thorey, who

lay awake for a long time listening, heard him singing out there, and then heard him stop singing. Then she thought that she heard voices in debate; and presently Thorgils began to sing again—but not quite the same tune. She fell asleep, woke again and listened, heard nothing, and looked out of the window. She saw Thorgils sitting on the turf wall, very upright, staring up into the sky. His face looked white in the moonlight, and she saw Earth-house-prey gleaming on his knees, like a stream of water. She went back to bed, telling herself that nobody would best a man like Thorgils.

In the morning he came into her bed, very cold and with nothing to say. His answer was always, Nothing. “Did you see anything?” Nothing. “Did the cattle take any harm?” Nothing. “Did you hear anything?” Nothing. He shivered a little, and looked blue about the hands, cheek-bones and shoulder-blades. His knees were quite blue, and his feet white. But no more cattle died, and Thorgils thought that the battle was over. Thorey told Gudrun that her husband was the bravest of men as he was one of the strongest. If he said that he saw or heard nothing he did not mean that she

was to believe it—and she did not believe it; he meant that he had nothing to tell her about it. “He might tell it you, I think,” said Gudrun, “or you might have it out of him if you chose.”

“I don’t choose,” Thorey replied. “He knows best.”

CHAPTER VIII

THE CALL FROM ERIC THE RED

SOME years now passed over Treadholt, prosperous years with no ill-fortune threatening. Thorny, the eldest child of Thorgils and Thorey, was seven years old; there had been a boy, Thorlaf, too, who had not lived to be five; and Thorey had hopes of another. Just then there came a messenger from the sea, a man who brought news of Eric the Red. That great adventurer had been in many lands since Thorgils had been in his company long ago; he had been in Russia, and since that to Greenland. Now he was gone to Greenland again, with a large convoy, and asked Thorgils to join him. "Eric bid me remind you, Thorgils, of your promise made to him when you parted on the Norway seas," the messenger said. "He did not think, and I don't think, that you would deny it. He is bound for a fine country where he thinks of making a

settlement; and he says that if he can be sure of you he will be in a fair way to found a kingdom. Do you come out, with what company you can form, and you shall choose land where you will." Thorgils said that Eric was building on a light foundation. "He has the promise of a lad, and he wants to risk upon it the welfare of a man and his family. If his building falls he is very little the worse—but what about me?" He would not give an answer one way or the other, and saw the messenger off the place with no word more.

But it stayed in his mind for all that, and next spring, when Eadwine his friend came to see him, with a shipload of Greenland stuff for him—not only furs, but gold as well, and amber and iron—Thorgils began to be serious about the message he had had, and talked to Thorey about it.

She was with child and unwilling; but she did not refuse. "It is a great risk to flit so far," was all she said.

Thorgils said that certainly it was a risk. "Eric has asked for me," he said, "and I think that I ought to go. You and I have never been parted, and never had a bad word between

us from the beginning, nor shall we have one now. You shall stay here and mind the house, with friends to help you—and we have many friends. But for my part, I shall go."

Thorey was troubled. She thought he was for once making a mistake; she told him so—but then she put her hand on his knee. "I shall go with you, if go you must," she said. "I thought you would," he told her, and was evidently pleased. Then he began with his preparations and sought about to make up a good party among his friends. Thorlaf, who was a son of Eadwine and had been left in his charge by his father, was to come; Col and Starkad, the two foster brothers of Thorey, now settled in homesteads of their own, chose to join with Thorgils rather than with their father. Gudrun, who was fond of Thorgils and anxious for his good opinion, said that she would go. They took ten thralls altogether, and Thorarin the reeve of Treadholt. With all these people Thorgils took a quantity of stock too. It was to be a great flitting. He put Treadholt and all the lands which went with it into the keeping of Haering his half-brother, and his money with it, feeling that he could trust him with so much.

Finally, when he had made all his preparations, at the last minute Iostan came down from Calf-holt and told him that he had made up his mind to break his home up, and share fortunes. "The countryside will never be the same again with you gone," he said. "I bring twelve souls with me, good company all of us." "We shall want a big ship," Thorgils said; "bigger than I thought. But I won't deny you in this."

He went far to get a ship to his liking, but found one in Olvus which pleased him. She was both roomy and strongly-built. She lay in the creek there; and as soon as the bargaining was done, and all preparations concluded, he moved out all his household, and stayed with a friend of his called Thorodd at Hialla. It was fully late in the season; but he hoped for a good passage. Unfortunately it happened that Thorny his daughter fell ill, and it became a question whether she should be taken or not. She was nine years old, a very pretty child.

He waited three days, but dared not wait any longer. He told Thorey that they must leave her behind. She looked at him with her eyes full of trouble, but raised none of it in speech. "What you think best," she said, "must be

so." So Thorny was left with Thorodd to foster and a good portion settled on her in case she were to marry before her people came home. Thorodd prophesied good fortune for her, but Thorgils was heavy when the time came for leaving Iceland. "If I had not great faith in Eric I wouldn't go even now. Yet a promise is a thing to be kept."

"It isn't easy to judge a great man," Thorodd said. "You are backing your own judgment, after all, rather than Eric the Red's."

"Yes," said Thorgils, "I believe in him—but I own that I would give a good deal to be out of this adventure."

"It is not too late, neighbour . . ." Thorodd began to say; but Thorgils frowned.

"It is too late for me to go back on my bond," he said. "I expect I shall go through with it."

"I don't doubt you will," Thorodd said; and that was how they parted.

They all went on board, and waited for a wind to take them out of the firth. Iostan had all the ship before the mast for his party; Thorgils with his took the after-deck, but Gudrun, Starkad and Col chose to lodge with him. Each kept pretty much to their own part of the ship,

and Iostan's company, which was in high spirits, made a great chatter. Thorgils felt the responsibility on him, and remained sunk in dejection. He still had dreams at night, and it seemed to him that Thor would never let him alone.

Sometimes he stood at his bedside and loaded him with reproaches; sometimes he seemed to be in a strange country, and Thor beside him showing him the terrors of it. One of his dreams was that he and Thor stood on a wild shore, where there were black cliffs, and a high sea breaking against them. The cloud wrack was heavy and low down, driven by a great wind off the sea. It came on dense drifts of fog which, when it parted, showed him wide stretches of water white with foam. He saw a ship helpless in the storm driving fast upon the rocks. Thor said, "In just such a strait will you be before long, with a cold and lonely death before you, unless you turn to me again. Look to it." And Thorgils thought that his eyeballs grew hot and smarted with the rage which possessed him as he answered the fiend: "Be off with you and tempt me not. The Son of God is my friend, Who spent His manhood and His blood for the

sake of us. He will be with us on our journey, and if we are to perish we shall reach Him the sooner." Then he awoke and saw that Thorey was looking at him. " You have been dreaming," she said. He confessed it. " Not happily," she said. " No, not happily," said Thorgils, and told her the dream.

She said that she did not like it, and should never have dared go on in the face of such an omen if it had happened to herself. Thorgils said that it did not do to give way before such things. " I shall never give in to Thor or to any of them. That would be a baseness not to be thought of." " You are quite right," she said, " but you will need your courage. I won't answer for some of them if Thor shows himself to them. They aren't all like you." Thorgils said that he wasn't afraid of them.

CHAPTER IX

TROUBLE AT SEA

THE wind came fair off the land as they sailed out of the firth and reached the open sea. Their course was now N. N. W., and the wind holding, they were soon out of sight of land. After a week of prosperous journey, however, the wind gave out, and they drifted helpless and aimless over the back of the sea; and it became anxious work. They had provisions for a fortnight, which should have been ample; but Iostan's party had little fore-thought and feasted high and drank deep. Thorgils saw that he would have to interfere very soon, and put the whole ship on strict rations. But he had other and worse anxieties. He had started late in the season, counting, as he fairly might do, on a steady wind. But if he was to be much delayed he would scarcely reach Greenland before the winter, which he knew

began early. Meantime there was nothing to be done but wait for a wind.

He gave Iostan a hint that they had best be careful with their stores. Iostan was surprised. "We trusted to you entirely," he said. "There should have been more than enough; and it's rather hard to have such a thing sprung on us when we are out at sea, and no means of helping ourselves. You had better leave it to me," he said. "If you go and terrify my people I don't say what might come of it." Thorgils left it so; but could not see that there was much difference in the ways of the foredeck. He had not thought Iosan so weak with men as he proved to be; but worse than Iostan was his wife Thorgerd, a strong, big woman with the ways of a man. She was Iostan's master in most things, and difficult to deal with.

After a week or more of dead calm it began to blow from the South-west, and raised heavy seas. The ship was overfreighted, and Thorgils thought that they would have to sacrifice some of their stock. They had cattle on board, between decks, and as fast as they died Thorgils had them thrown out. Thorgerd raised a great bother about it, saying it was wicked to sacri-

fice good food. "If you would sacrifice an ox to Thor," she said, "there would be some sense in it. Many of us are thinking that we are paying too dear for your new God." Thorgils sent her away; but she grumbled very freely. She ate and drank like a man at this time, and used to be very noisy and insolent.

Iostan was cast down by sea-sickness, with many of the others. Starkad and Col were just as bad. Iostan's son Thorarin, a young man of twenty, was the most useful of the company. Thorey, who was nearing her time, lay mostly in bed.

Now they had had two months of stormy weather, and were distressed for want of water. The seas ran high, and seemed bare of life. They met no other vessel, and saw no sign of land. Thorgils hardly left the helm, night or day, except for an hour at a time, when he dared leave it to Thorarin. It was hard to get the thralls to move about in such weather, with green seas sweeping the deck. Two or three were washed overboard, and nearly all the cattle had perished. Thorgils had made up his mind that it was all over with them unless the storm should abate within three days.

It did abate, by good fortune. They were able to correct their course, and get things shipshape again; but still there was no sight of the land. Thorgils made the strictest rules for diet. He divided up everything that they had, and himself gave out the daily rations to everybody on board. It was well that he did, for they had yet another three weeks at sea.

It was cold weather now, and though the wind had died away, the sea ran high in great rollers. There seemed to be a great current, too, setting to the South-west. They saw their first iceberg at this time, and at first hailed it for the mainland. The sea was breaking upon it. They saw a bear walking about on a flat shelf; and high up on the ice-cliffs of it clouds of sea-birds. Some of these they managed to shoot with their bows. Then, when they did actually see land, they believed for a long time that it was another iceberg. It looked just the same: all snowslopes and green ice.

It began to blow again when they had been nearly three months at sea, but were in sight of the land. They made out that they could see the Western shores of Greenland. The storm grew in intensity, and one night when it was at its

highest the main-mast carried away, and they were helpless. That night they came ashore upon the rocks and had to remain in the utmost peril until daylight.

It was a time of wild alarm for all hands. Thorgils remained on deck all the time except for a short moment when he went below to see how the women fared. Thorey was in great pain, but kept herself as still as she could, and it comforted to see her steady eyes resting upon him. Gudrun was beside her, and the two, he could see, had faith in him. Thorgils sat beside her and took her hand for a while. He told her that he had little hope of saving the ship, which was fast wedged in the rocks. He did not think that she would break up yet. Even as he spoke every breaking wave caused her to shudder from stem to stern. Thorey told him that she wasn't frightened—but he knew her better. She said that she was glad Thorny was safe at home, and as she said it her eyes filled with tears, and she was obliged to turn her head away. Gudrun sat on the floor and held Thorgils' knees. They were quiet here, but elsewhere there was screaming and much commotion, Thorgerd drunk and shouting. He could

not remain with Thorey long, as he had to visit every one in turn and endure as best he could the reproaches they flung at him.

He was on deck when the first twilight of morning showed. Their ship was fast in a cleft between two great rocks, which themselves were the outworks of the cliffs—one of the horns of a bay. As the light gained he was able to make out the lie of the bay, and how it was almost landlocked, and safe from the weather. Once in there, they could choose the best landing-place and get the women out of danger; but how to launch the boat in the present sea he did not know at all. He went forward and examined the cliffs carefully in the hope of finding a way of landing by them; but there was no help in that quarter. As soon as it was light enough he gave orders to get out the boat, and put the women and children aboard her. He himself took Thorey in his arms and got her into the boat. She was too ill now to be terrified. Thorarin, Iostan's son, was put in command, and they pulled away from the rocks. It was frightful to see them mount the seas and lurch down out of sight; that was the worst half-hour of Thorgils' life so far.

But by the providence of God they escaped the breakers and the cliffs, and he saw them into smooth water. They set to work then to get the stores out and all the things which they must have; and when the boat came back most of this was bestowed in her, and the better part of the men. Thorgils remained until the last, not believing for a moment at a time that the ship would last out till his turn came. But she did—it was when he was close to shore that he saw her part amidships and the bows dip and sink. There was the end of that ship, then; but they were in Greenland.

The bay in which they were was of great extent, and cliffs enclosed it in two horns. The mountains, which were covered with ice, came sharply down to the shore. This was sandy, with scarcely enough herbage at the edge to feed a couple of sheep; but on the western horn there seemed to be a greater depth of ground, and it was there Thorgils determined they must build themselves a shelter against the winter. As he judged, that could not be far off. He thought it would set in cold when the storm was spent. There was abundance of wreckage and

driftwood all along the shore—more than enough to build a good house.

Having chosen the site, all hands set to work to build the house. It was made after the fashion of their country, a long hall with a cross-division in the middle—two hearths back to back, and two doors, one for each part of the house. Thorgils was determined to keep the companies separate. He had not been at all satisfied with Iostan's people on the voyage. They had been thrifless and noisy; they had been for ever at extremes, and at either extreme unmanageable. He felt that he could deal with his own, but that the others were beyond him. There should be an equal division of whatever was saved from the wreck, and then each party must shift for itself. So far as he could see, they must stay out the winter in this bay, where they were sheltered from the worst of the weather. He hoped that they would get fish to live on—and didn't allow himself to wonder how else they were to subsist.

They were two weeks or more building their hall, and in the meantime the women lived in a cave in the rocks, with a great fire to keep them warm. Gudrun and some of the servant-girls

helped with the building. Thorey lay abed; she was now very ill, and expecting her child from day to day. They kept her warm and dry, but that was all they could do.

CHAPTER X

THE FIRST WINTER

WHEN the house was finished, they moved into it what stores they had; a certain amount of meal remained to them, but not enough to see the winter out; some stockfish; some onions; nothing else worth talking about, except mead, and of that too much remained. The cattle were dead and cast overboard, and the sheep were all dead. They had saved their chests from the wreck, and had them in the hall. They dried seaweed to eke out the bedding; and then they moved in. Thor-ey's baby was born in the cave, and called Thor-finn. She had a bad confinement and could not nourish him well on the food which they had to do with.

All hands, by common consent, went to the fishing, which was very well so long as the bay remained open. Thorgils doubted it would be shut to them when the heart of the winter had

grown round them; but meantime they had good catches. They climbed the encircling cliffs and penetrated the upland country so far as they could. They made out herds of deer on the distant heights, and saw the tracks of bears, but met with no animals within range; and the snow lay very deep up there. Whenever there was a partial thaw the white fogs settled down upon them like a blanket; and then there was nothing to be done.

It was a terrible winter indeed, full of disaster and trouble, of which the worst must be told. Men take trouble in different ways, some as if they expected it, and intended to see it through; and of that sort was Thorgils, who was a religious man and able to control his household because he was always able to control himself. Of the other sort was Iostan, a light-hearted, easy-going man when the world went well with him, but in times of stress unstable. He had never had any other way of meeting difficulty than that of high spirits and audacity. To get those in sufficiency he knew no better plan than to eat and drink all he could carry. His wife was worse than he was, a woman with a man's frame, a man's appetite, and the heart

and nerve of her own sex. She ate and drank like a man, and scolded like a woman. On their side of the house matters were always in extremes. They revelled, and they desponded; they fought, and then they loved. Half the night they caroused, and then weren't ready in the morning to take their share of foraging for victual. The consequence was that Thorgils and his men did far better at the fishing than they did, so that very often at the end of the day they would have had nothing to take in if Thorgils had not shared his catch with them. As trouble increased so did Iostan's character worsen. He now made a grievance of it if Thorgils did not offer to share his catch; he was greatly offended when he was reproved for the noise he allowed at night; but what was worst of all, he drew away from Thorgils his son Thorarin, a fine young man and one of the best of the whole ship's company. Thorgils felt that more than he cared to say.

So things went on, badly enough, till Christmas, and after that they went worse. There was sickness on Iostan's side of the house, and the long bitter nights told upon their spirits. They began to hear noises, and to imagine ter-

rible things. Thorgerd, Iostan's wife, was one of the worst. She was nearly always the worse for drink, and saw and heard all sorts of things. One night when they were feasting and making a great noise—with the wind howling outside and the snow driving—there came a loud knock at the door, and then a dead silence. Somebody said, “ If that should be good news ”: and then a man jumped up. “ I'm going out to them, whether or no.” He got the door open and ran out—but did not come back. Iostan and his son went out to look for him, but couldn't find him. They had torches and hunted all about the shore. Presently they saw him, with his arms stretched out, facing a rock, and jiggling up and down. They saw that he was mad, but mastered him and took him back. He screamed all the rest of the night until he died.

Next evening it was much the same. There was a thump on the door, and a man of theirs stood up. “ My turn,” he said, and went out. They followed him quickly, and saw him running like a wild thing among the boulders and snowdrifts. He looked as if he was being chased by something, and ran screaming into the sea. They never saw him again.

Then sickness took them—scurvy; and one after another they died. Iostan took it on Twelfth Night, and Thorgerd, who was now sobered, nursed him. She wouldn't allow either Thorey or Gudrun to come near him. "You brought all this misery upon us; now keep away and let us alone." When Iostan was dead, and they had buried him with the others in the snowdrift, Thorgerd took the disease, and died of it. Thorarin was the last of them to go, and he died on Thorgils' side of the house, in Gudrun's arms. They buried him apart, near the wreck of the ship, and put a rock over him.

No hurt had so far come to Thorgils' company; but they were sadly cast down, and in mortal terror of the unquiet dead. There seems no doubt but that the dead walked. They thought that they heard them shouting and singing wild foolish songs in their empty hall. They heard them thump the door, and the madmen screaming outside in the snow. Thorey said nothing; but she used to fix her dark-blue eyes on Thorgils, and tremble, though she did all she could to control herself. Gudrun had not so much command. She was very much changed from what she had been; she was grown hag-

gard and lined in the face. There seemed no spring left in her. But she was as fond of Thorgils as ever she had been, and always careful of his good opinion.

Thorgils himself was troubled by the walking of the dead, but more because his women-kind were so much affected. It kept growing worse as the winter wore on. Some time in February he told Starkad and Col (who had been of his party from the beginning) that he thought that they must make an end of it, and they agreed to help him. The thralls would not bear a hand at any price; but Thorgils with the two young men dug up all the bodies out of the drifts, and made a wood pile, and burned them all. It took them two days. All were burned except Thorarin, who lay quiet under his rock.

After that there was no trouble from ghosts; and about March, when the worst of the winter was over, Thorgils set to work to build a new ship out of the wreck of the old one, and such timbers as they could collect off the shore. There was any quantity of it. They set up their stocks on a part of the beach which edged on to the deep water, and having a fine store of tools,

there was very soon something to be seen worth looking at. Their spirits rose; they began to talk of voyaging again. Thorgils said little, but worked like a dozen, saw to everything and kept a firm hand on his thralls. He dared not look far forward—still less look back. What he said he did not always, in his heart, believe; nevertheless he spoke hopefully to all of them about the summer that was coming.

Yet the summer came, and the ship could not be finished before it was half over. Their hands were too few and the work too hard for that. Thorgils dared not start without a great store of provisions, and to get that all men must go hunting or fishing, and the women must souse and salt, or smoke and salt what the men brought in. They were able to go far afield, for the summers were hot, and most of the snow melted. They got upon the track of the reindeer and did well; they trapped birds; seals, too, they got, as well as quantities of fish. Thorgils made a conduit to bring water down from the hills to their house. He laid it underground in the hope that he might keep the frost out. He had kept back some of their grain, and had sowed it as soon as the weather opened. There

was a good harvest from that, enough at least to keep them through the next winter. He had collected green-meat also, and having caught a wild she-goat with two kids, kept her in milk for the sake of Thorey and her baby. Thorey had not been able to walk all the summer; he did not believe in his heart that she would live through another winter.

Now he had to break it to her, and to all of them, that they must bide until next year. Thorey said that she had known it, but Gudrun desponded a great deal, and never picked up heart after the cold weather set in.

She took ill in earnest about Christmas-time, and nobody but Thorgils seemed to do her any good. She lay in her bed, with her bright eyes fixed upon him, listening to what he had to tell her, and when he stopped, waiting for him to go on again. When he talked hopefully of the next summer, and said that he must find a husband for her before it was too late, she said, "It is too late. I shan't see another summer, but if I had seen ten more I should never have married." Thorgils said, "You will fall in love, my dear, and then you will sing another song altogether." She said quietly, "I fell in

love long ago, and have never fallen out of it." Thorgils, who had no thought of what was in her mind, asked her what had become of her choice: "And how did you come to leave him behind you?" Gudrun said, "I did not. He is here." By the look she gave him then, he knew what she meant, and turned the talk to other things—but he felt very badly about it, and did not care to tell Thorey, who was lying nearby, but had been asleep at the time.

Gudrun died a few days later, and they buried her just below the house, and put a cross over her grave. Then Thorgils told Thorey what she had said to him. She smiled rather sadly. "That was never hidden from me," she said. "Gudrun loved you ever since you took her in at Treadholt after Sorle's slaughter. I saw it as plainly as I see you now." "She had no reason," Thorgils said, and Thorey still smiled. "There is no reason in love; but much pain very often; and sometimes there is joy too. But those who have the most pain love the better, I believe." Then said Thorgils, "Why, then, Gudrun loved me better than you have done, since she has had the most pain." Thorey had tears in her eyes. "Nay, my beloved, but I

have had pain too—and now my grief is very heavy.” He asked her why, but she would not tell him; and he had not the heart to press her, because he knew.

CHAPTER XI

THE HEAVIEST STROKE

HOWEVER, with the opening of the spring weather Thorey seemed to get better. She had given up nursing her baby since they had plenty of goat's milk. Now she was able to rise from her bed and be useful about the house for short spells of time; but her weakness used to come over her like a flood of water; she fainted often, and Thorgils urged her to keep her bed yet awhile.

She went back to bed, and lay there patiently, sleeping a good deal, but dreaming constantly. She told Thorgils sometimes what she had been dreaming about, and seemed to expect him to interpret for her. One morning when he came in to see how she was, he saw a great light in her eyes. "Sit down by me," she said, "and I'll tell you my dream. I thought that I stood at the door of a white house, looking down a valley. There was blue sky above me, and dew on the

grass. And I saw sheep feeding on the slopes of the hills, and a shepherd lying on his cloak spread out, watching them. And in the valley bottom where the river ran there were people—men and maids, too; and a game of ball was going on. They were kicking the ball backwards and forwards across the river. Once it fell in; and there was shouting and laughing. Then a young man plunged in and swam to get it. I saw him shake the water out of his eyes as he settled to his breaststroke. It was all so soft and fair and happy—being still weather with a promise of heat to come—that I tried to go to sleep again, that I might dream it again. But I couldn't do that, so waited for you to come that you might tell me what it all meant.” She spoke eagerly, with colour high in her cheeks, and made Thorgils unhappy; for he was sure that she would not get better, or ever see such pleasant valleys again.

But he said, “That was a rare dream of yours, and soon I hope we shall be ready to try after a place of the sort. There are people of our own country somewhere in this desert, and they are waiting for us as the seasons pass over. We had bad hap in driving on to this wilderness

of rock and ice, and have never been able to mend our fortunes yet."

"To be sure," said Thorey. "We are not to blame for our troubles, nor is anybody to blame. But you don't tell me what you think about my dream. Does it not foretell good fortune?"

Thorgils said, "It looks like that. But you and I would do wiselier to look upon it as a vision of another world, such as we have been taught to hold to, and your dream may be a figure of what reward you and holy women like you are to receive from God and the Saviour of men. There will be a house in a sweet valley kept for you, and good friends to help you there after your brave life and your troubles, none of your deserving."

"Ah," said Thorey, who was now crying softly, "get us all out of this horrible place if you can. I am sore to be home again."

It was not the nature of the man to promise more than he saw his way to winning. All he had to say was that he did not know how that was to be just yet. But he told her presently that he hoped to launch the ship in a week or little more, and that she would surely be fin-

ished before the bay was clear of ice. This was in the early days of the spring.

He was as good as his word. The ship was launched and rode in the deep water. They made good speed with the rigging of her, and expected to get the stores on board within a month. Meantime Thorgils was much exercised to know what sort of a course he ought to take when he left the bay, and was always climbing the hills about to spy out the bearing of the land. He had discovered that islands—a cluster of them—lay about half a day's sailing to the S. S. W. There was one of these which ran up into a cove, and he rather thought he should try for an anchorage out there, and climb up that hill for further discovery. He hadn't yet been able to get a fair view Eastward, whither he rather suspected Eric and his settlers were gone. There was a way—or what looked like a way—up a glacier to some high crags, north of their settlement, which tempted him. He made up his mind that he would try that before he set sail.

Their way of life had for a long time run a regular course. Every day the thralls, with Thorarin the reeve, used to go out fishing in the

boat. That was necessary for their daily livelihood. Thorgils himself, with Thorlaf, Eadwine's son, and the brothers Starkad and Col, when they were not hunting, were busy about the house or the fields which they had made round it. But just now all their time was taken up with the ship. One of them always remained near the house in case Thorey should want anything.

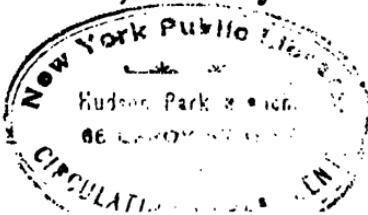
Now there came a fine day, clear and still, and Thorgils determined upon his exploration.

He told Thorey that he should not be long away.

¶ She said that she was never happy without him,
¶ but that he must do what he thought right.
¶ "You have never failed me ever since I have
¶ known you," she told him—and he remembered
¶ that afterwards.

¶ The young men were wild to go with him, as was natural enough, seeing the winter behind them and a spell of hard work. Thorgils thought that one at least of them should stay at home; but they clamoured and begged it of him, and he gave way. The reeve should see the thralls out to their fishing-ground, and himself stay behind in the house.

That was settled, and they started early in



the morning for the glacier. They had axes with them as well as their weapons. Earth-house-prey never left Thorgils' belt.

The climbing was slow work, and took longer than they expected. It was fairly three in the afternoon before they reached the crags and got the look-out they had hoped for. Certainly, a fine prospect; a spacious land of mountain and valley, breaking into innumerable capes and creeks, with the sea beyond sparkling and trembling in the light. Looking South and Southeast, Thorgils was now sure that it would be thereabouts he must expect to find Eric and the Icelanders with him. There showed to be fair shores there; and one great firth he saw which he thought must be Eric's creek. There was enough pasture there, he judged, to feed half a million sheep. The mountains sloped gently towards the estuary, and were covered with woods. That was a great country, and thither he promised himself he should be sailing before the weeks were many behind him. Out at sea it was plain the ice-packs were breaking up. Come a warm wind from the West and there would be a fair way. He felt very much cheered by all that he saw, thinking to himself, he would have

a good tale for Thorey when he was at home again. She might be spared to find in that gracious country the happy valley of her dream! So he fondly promised himself.

But he found it was getting late in the day, so gave the word for home. The weather also had thickened; he was afraid of being caught in a snowstorm. Surely enough, before they were half-way down, or a little more than that, the wind got up and large flakes of snow began to flit past them, tokens of what was to come.

Thorgils himself led, and was able to find the path they had cut for themselves. They had to step very carefully, and had roped themselves. Slowly and painfully they descended the first glacier, and made better way climbing the ridge which took them to the second. When they were atop of that they should have been able to find Thorgils' Bay, for so they had called it, and all the scene of their weary years. And so they did, although the snow was coming thickly, and the whole prospect was muffled in it. One thing Thorgils could *not* see, and that was the ship. He strained his eyes through the dirty weather, but in vain. He had no suspicion of anything amiss, however, supposing that the reeve had

warped her into snugger quarters out of the storm; nevertheless he quickened his pace, while at the bottom of his mind lay a grain of discomfort which he could neither explain nor get rid of.

It was drawing in towards night when they came down to the level ground, and had the hall in front of them. Most certainly the ship was not there, and nobody could say where it was. Thorlaf, who had noticed her absence some time ago, ran on in front and went into the hall. He did not come back. Thorgils walked quickly to the door; and as he reached it Thorlaf came out to meet him. He said nothing, but his face showed immediately that something was wrong. He seemed unable to speak, and unwilling to meet: it was as if he was afraid of Thorgils.

He for his part did not speak either. He heard the child wailing, and pushed in. The moment he was in the door he saw that something was very wrong. The chests had gone; lockers were open and the blankets and other things in them tumbled about. Starkad, who was just behind him, said over his shoulder to Col, "A bad business here;" but Thorgils was now in the hall and across the room to Thorey's bed.

The child was crying, and he could see where she lay. He looked at her. She was dead, with her eyes and mouth open. The child was groping about to find her breast. Thorgils looked long at her, and a great pain seemed to burn inside him.

“ Oh, Thorey,” he said, “ oh, wife, anything but this.” Then he broke up, and fell on his knees beside her and sobbed, that it was pity to hear him.

But Thorlaf had seen something else, and showed it to the two brothers. There was a patch of blood upon the quilt. He turned that back, and followed it through all her coverings until they saw the place where she had been hurt. The blood had stiffened there all round about, but there was a wet place in the middle of the wound. She had been stabbed under the left arm.

They left Thorgils alone, and went to look about for what might remain to them. All the provisions had been taken, the stores which they had been the better part of a year collecting; nearly all the ship-building tools, two of the goats, the ship, the boat, and all the tackle. They supposed the old she-goat had only been left

because the thieves had been hurried. Thorarin the reeve had disappeared with the thralls. Either they had forced him to go along, or else he was killed and hidden somewhere.

In the face of calamity like this, with one consent they returned to the hall to get the countenance of Thorgils. They found the poor man with his child in his arms, trying to warm and quiet it. He was now himself again and gave them directions what to do. One should make a good fire, and one set water to boil. Dismayed to find that he did not yet know the extent of their losses, Col threw up his hands at the talk of boiling water; but Thorgils quietly said, "They have left the little kettle. There it is on the hearth. Thieves can't think of everything." Then Starkad told him that the she-goat was left, and Thorgils thanked God. "Go and draw me a horn of milk, my friend. Thorfinn is hungry."

So were they all, God knew, but there was no time to think of that; and by some happy fortune before night they found the remains of a side of reindeer which the thieves had overlooked. They made a great fire and lay about it, as close as they could get, for there was no

bedding left except that which covered Thorey. But Thorgils did not disturb her, and nobody else dared. As for Thorgils himself, having fed Thorfinn, he put him inside his coat and lay on his elbow all night, watching over him. It was a bad night for all of them, but for him the worst he had ever known in his life, or was ever likely to know.

CHAPTER XII

THE ISLANDS

HE was much changed by that dreadful stroke. The spring was out of him which had made him ever the first in adventure; but in one thing he was not changed at all. All the grief he felt for Thorey he kept closely to himself. The graves of the two foster sisters lay side by side, a cross upon each. None saw Thorgils beside them; none knew whether he prayed there or not, or shed tears, or allowed his thoughts to turn backward to days of past and done happiness. It is likely that he did not seek out the graves; he was not a man to mourn over what was done; but each of the three companions left him out of near thirty who had started out noticed how fiercely he attached himself to his child Thorfinn. It looked as if all his strong heart had fastened itself about that frail plant. He never let him be out of his sight,

slept with him, washed and fed him himself. They thought that if the boy should die during the coming winter Thorgils would himself give up his wish to live—and what would become of them then?

It was plain that they must look for another winter in the deserted bay. It would be three years since they came into it, and for the whole of that time no living soul had they seen except each other. They were hard put to it to feed themselves, and knowing that it would be harder in the wintertime, they spent all their time hunting; for now that they had no boat it was difficult to fish. They made themselves lines and hooks out of odd tackling which they found about; with these they used to fish off the rocks. But the nets were all gone, and what little they caught with the lines was hardly reward for the time spent on it. As for their hunting, that was an inordinate weariness for little gain. They made traps for small animals—squirrels and such-like—went far afield after reindeer, and, having made themselves arrows after a fashion, shot a few birds. Thorgils killed a bear with a spear early in the winter, and that kept them for near two months.

Out of the skin of that bear came their salvation. They dressed it in its own grease, and made of it a hide-boat on a framework of drift-wood. The thieves had taken nearly all their tools; but they had a few augurs, and the axes they had had with them on the day of disaster. They were at it all the winter, working in the dark by the light of the fire. Then when the third spring came round, and the ice began to break up again, Thorgils said that they would go.

They spent the last night in the bay, singing their hymns and saying their prayers before they lay down to sleep. Early in the morning Starkad went out to see to his squirrel-traps and sea-lines and to fetch them in for the journey, and on his way out he turned to the graves of his sister and foster sister. He saw a writing there, carved on a board, and read it:

Here Thorey sleeps, and here beside
Gudrun her sister lies asleep;
They loved and lived as one, and died:
Vex them not, voyager, neither weep
Their lot. The Shepherd knows His sheep,
And in His fold their hearts abide.

He knew then that Thorgils had been out before him.

They made up their packages and loaded the coracle with as much as they dared put in. Then they dragged her down the shore and over the pack-ice. The bay was still solid ice, but outside in the open sea there were lanes of water where they could work the oars. It was fair weather and not much wind. Starkad and Col rowed the boat, while Thorgils and Thorlaf stood with poles ready to ward off the ice, which was dangerous. More than once they had to jump for it, and haul the boat out of the water. But the further out to sea they reached the better it became, and by mid-day there was little danger from the ice, and they were able to hoist a sail which they had made out of the bed-sheet which had been left under Thorey. They sailed South and by West, to the islands which they had made out from the crag-top. Thorgils had an idea that the thieves would have gone thither as the nearest land, sooner than venture round the coast. It was almost certain that they would have made no long stay there; yet there was always a chance that bad seamanship had lost

them their vessel. In any case there was less trouble to be feared from the ice out in the open sea; and he reckoned on finding seals there, and sea-birds also.

In all of his forecastings he turned out to be right. They came safely ashore on one of the islands, and built themselves a tent, using the driftwood which they found in abundance. They were lucky in finding a spring of water in a hill; and were soon certified that sea-birds' eggs would not fail them for a time. As for seals, they were there like cattle on all hands, resting on the shores, or out at sea on floes of ice, or furrowing in the water like porpoises at play. Thorgils blessed God that they had escaped so far, and come to a place where they could not starve.

But Thorfinn had now to go without milk. It is true that they had taken the she-goat, but she was in no case to be milked, being but dry meat. They boiled sea-mews' eggs for his first meal and gave him one of them. He could talk a little by now—he was nearing his second birthday. He ate half of his egg, would take no more of it. “Courage, man,” Thorgils said to him; “have another bite at it.” “No, no,” Thorfinn said.

“ Why, what’s the matter with the egg? ” Starkad asked him. Thorfinn said, “ Father won’t eat his all, and I won’t either.” It was true that Thorgils stinted himself of food, and had for a long time when they were so short on the mainland. Now he said, “ Go along with you. I’ll have another if you will.” Then Thorfinn ate the rest of his egg.

They stayed where they were till about mid-summer, with plenty to do to keep themselves provisioned, and to explore the islands round about. They were numerous, but so far as they could ascertain at present, not inhabited. Yet the wreckage they found showed them that men had been here; whether dead or alive, who knows? Among other things, useful or not, they found an oar with runes cut upon it to this effect:—

At home, head-washing, harbours Slug;
While on the cold sea here I tug:
Blisters and back-ache—there’s my toll
For Slug-at-home’s soap-suddled poll.

Thorgils was very excited over this find. They could not make out why. He told them

presently that he believed Thorarin the reeve had cut the runes. "They are in his vein," he said. "He was thinking of his brother Geir, who used to make his wife wash his head for him once a week." They thought that fanciful, and so it may have been—yet it did happen that they were to find Thorarin upon one of these islands.

But before they could do that they had a terrible hour to get through. It came about, when they were exploring one of the islands, that they found it a good fishing-ground and determined to stay the night there. The weather was then warm and settled. They built themselves a tent, made a fire, and broiled some fish for a supper. While they were busy about it, Col, who had been out to fetch in a big stone to heat, came in again looking rather blank. Thorlaf asked him what had hurt him, but Col put his finger to his lips, frowning. That gave Thorlaf a hint that Thorgils was not to be worried, and also it alarmed him. He took the opportunity to slip out—sure enough, their boat was gone. Desperate work that. Having made sure that it was nowhere in sight, he went back to the tent, and kept his own counsel. Thorgils had no

doubts, made his meal and disposed himself to sleep as calmly as he generally did. But in the morning, according to his custom, he was the first to wake, and the first to go out. He missed the boat immediately, and stood looking over the sea for a long time. If he thought, he did not know it; and yet at the back of his mind he must have known what there was to be done.

Presently he walked slowly back to the tent, and saw Col waiting for him. They looked at each other without speaking.

Col spoke first: "It is gone." Thorgils echoed him: "Yes, it is gone."

Then Col said, "That will be the death of us." "Well," said Thorgils, "I think it likely." Then there was silence between them.

Presently Thorgils spoke again, and his voice was altered so much that one could hardly know him. "We can't keep the boy alive," he said. "One of you must kill him, for I cannot."

"Nay, nay," said Col, "there's no need of that yet."

"Yes," said Thorgils, "but there is. We can't keep alive here long. There's no water. To see him suffer thirst and die of it is not possible. You must do as I tell you, and come back

to me here when it is done.” He would not look at Thorfinn when they took him away.

The three young men went a little way off, Starkad carrying the child on his shoulder. Then they sent him to play by the sea, and talked about what they should do. Thorlaf said that nothing would make him do it, but the other two must settle for themselves. Col and Starkad argued about it, Col saying that Thorgils had been right. “ We must perish here for want of water,” he said, “ and it is better to die quickly of smothering than slowly of thirst and torment. Besides his own there would be frenzy and despair for Thorgils and for us.”

But Starkad said that all was not at an end for another day and a night. “ If our strength held us we might swim from this island to another, where water might be. And so indeed from island to island. I say that Thorgils is already repenting of this bidding of his, and I tell you that if we were to do it—and which of us will do it?—Thorgils will feel it so badly that he may never get over it. He has had more troubles than most men can bear, but they were in a manner not of his own doing. No man can fight with such fate as his. But this would be

his work—and suppose, when it was done, we found some means of escape!"

Col had no answer ready, but looked over at his brother. "Then you won't do it?"

"No," said Starkad, "I'll never do such a thing as that."

"Why, then," said Col, "we are all of one mind, for whoever does it, it won't be me."

They went back to the hut, but left Thorfinn outside. Thorgils was sitting in there. He looked at them terribly. "Is it done?"

They told him, No. He frowned, and stared about, and then broke into tears. In the midst of his tears he came to them and thanked them. "This it is to have good men to deal with, that they will save a man from his own wickedness. I am ashamed of my despair, for I ought to have had faith in God, and lost it. If you had done my bidding and after that we had found a way to escape alive, I should never have been able to hold up my head. But my troubles are too much for me just now, and I suffer greatly."

It seemed like an answer to honesty that there was heavy rain that day. It set in in the afternoon and rained most of the night. They used

their tent to convoy the water into a hole in the rocks, and saw their way to another twenty-four hours of life. But before those were spent they were to have their boat again.

CHAPTER XIII

THE BOAT COMES BACK

EARLY in the morning it was, earlier than Thorgils' hour for getting out of his bed—he was awoken by a shouting; he heard voices of men, calling in a tongue which he had never heard before. He jumped up and out of the tent. There, but a little way out from the shore, was his coracle, with two creatures in it, men or women, he knew not which. When they saw him they made signs with their arms and began to pull in shore; and now he saw that they had a burden with them, a man alive or dead who lay still with his head turned sideways, limply hanging, as if he had no power in his neck. He was rolled up in a blanket; and Thorgils knew the blanket before he knew the man. It was his own, had been upon a bed in the hall at Thorgils Bay. “Here is one of Thorey’s slayers come into my hands,” he said to himself, and a dreadful cheer rose up in his heart. By now the boat was brought in; the two women

who were dressed like men and had their legs swathed in skins haled it ashore; then stood with beaming broad faces, waiting for Thorgils. They had no fear of him at all, but talked very fast and both together, pointing to one of the distant islands, and enacting by gesture their discovery of the boat, the sick man at home, the theft of the boat, and the passaging of the sick man. Thorgils had no trouble in making out the whole tale. He understood that they must have seen the landing of his party from a distance; but how they reached him without a boat, or how they intended to get back again, was at present beyond his comprehension. However, that only puzzled him afterwards; just now he was taken up with the passenger. That was Thorarin the reeve, with a lead-coloured face and the heavy solemn eyes of a man in the presence of death. There, he thought, helpless before him and entirely in his power lay one of his wife's murderers, one of the wretches who, for all they knew, had left their master and his family to a certain and miserable death. Even as he thought it, he felt pity for the stricken man. Whatever he was, had done or had been enforced to do, he must be tended now. He

shouted for Thorlaf, who with Col came pushing out of the tent. They lifted the reeve and carried him in.

Thorarin became conscious after an anxious time of watching, and made signs that he was thirsty. They brought him water in the kettle and wet his lips and tongue. After that he drank from the spout, and drank eagerly as if he had been parched with drouth. He showed them grateful eyes; but Thorgils, seeing him now somewhat revived, would have none of his gratitude, and bent his brows upon him. The others all sat or stood about him, and he seemed to know what was expected of him, for he made more than one effort to begin; and they saw the sweat beading on his temples with the exertion.

Presently he came to himself again and said a few words. "Tied up," they heard him say, "hand and foot." That told them all that they wanted to know. Thorgils knew a great relief—of thralls you may expect thralls' deeds; but he had used this man as his friend.

Afterwards he told them his story. He said that he could not get the men off in the boat for a long time after the climbing-party had started. They hung about and made excuses.

Then, when he had them all down at the shore and half the gear bestowed, Snae-Coll, who seemed to be ringleader, folded his arms and said that he did not intend to go fishing that day. The rest stood round in a ring, murmuring, all looking at him (Thorarin). There was a wrangle, high words—"and it may be that I spoke more freely than I should"—then, suddenly, Snae-Coll sprang at him and threw him down. They tied him up like a bale of netting and left him on the shore. They themselves all went up to the house in a body. After hanging about the door, all talking vehemently, he saw Snae-Coll go in alone. He waited in terror for what he knew must be. Then he heard a cry, and then Snae-Coll must have come to the door; for all the others went in.

They were a good time inside the house, but presently they began to come out. Every man had a burden—they had gutted the house; and everything was piled in the boat. When she was full two of them rowed off to the ship. So it went on until a wind got up, and they thought it time to be off. They took Thorarin himself in the last load, hauled up the anchor, hoisted sail and stood out for the open sea. Not until

they were out of the bay did they cut his bonds. Then Snae-Coll, who was captain of them all, spoke to him freely. He said that for the better part of a year—ever since the ship-building began—they had been talking among themselves of a stroke for their freedom. “ We thought that death must be the end of it, and that it was better to die free than bond.” The mutiny had been devised suddenly, for they had not seen their way before they heard that all the masters were going together to the top of the crags. “ Now,” said Snae-Coll, “ we give you your choice. Either you shall serve with us for our common safety, or we presently heave you over-board. Which do you choose? ” Thorarin confessed that he had agreed to work with them, having a lingering hope in his head that if he could contrive to tip Snae-Coll into the sea he might cow the others, 'bout ship, and rejoin his masters. Thorgils, listening with his chin in his hand, nodded his head; but said nothing.

They made the islands, Thorarin said, and stayed there for the winter. They found one at least of them inhabited, and got on pretty well with the natives, each taking a girl for a wife. They made these girls work for them, but did

nothing themselves. Then, as soon as the weather mended and the spring of the year set in, they made up their minds to leave the islands. He could not find out whither they intended to go, nor did he know what suspicion may have brought it about that they settled to leave him behind. That was what they did, at all events. He saw them weigh anchor and sail away. They went South at first, but altered their course afterwards, and sailed East before a Westerly wind.

He lived with the natives of the island and they had been good to him; but he had long been ailing, and got worse and worse. Then he understood from the gestures of the women who looked after him that they had seen something or somebody out at sea. They left him and were away all day; and when they came back it was to wrap him in his blanket and carry him down to the coracle. He had a thought in his head that he should see something good before he died, but knew he was not long for this world. "You will bury me here, I daresay," he said; "but I would ask of you, master, to believe what I am telling you, and to carry a kind thought of me back home with you. For you

will reach home again, I am very sure." That was all he seemed able to say; for he shut his eyes, and breathed short and sharp through his nose.

Thorgils said, "God knows how far you have done right or wrong. I cannot think that you would be lying just now, and you at the gateway of death. However it may be, you shall die in peace, and have the burial of a Christian." He opened his eyes once and looked at Thorgils, who knew then that he had told no lies. After that he lay quite still for a longish time, and presently they found that he was dead.

They buried him in a hurry, took to their boat, and made haste to the island where all their stores were. Thorgils said that they would not stay there much longer, but would risk a journey to the mainland. There was full half the summer left.

CHAPTER XIV

A WELCOME FROM THE MAINLAND

WITH such stores of food and water as they could compass in the coracle, they rowed away from the islands on the first ebb. It was hot; a still day; the cliffs and mountains of Greenland could be seen through the brown haze, rising into white peaks above it, themselves looking like the clouds. Thorgils kept a North-easterly course, making out that he might be within hail of the land in from ten to twelve hours. A little wind got up about an hour before noon; they hoisted their sail and made better speed.

Their hearts were now high with hope, and even Thorgils began to be easier in his mind. He told them a dream he had had last night. "I was at home at Treadholt," he said, "and five candles were burning on the floor by my knee; and there was a thief in the biggest of them. Then presently a woman came in at the door and stood there looking at me; who then

came down the hall quickly, and snuffed the candle that had a thief in it with her fingers. 'A fine dripping mess you suffer here,' she said, and then, 'Do you come into the garth with me and answer for that theft shown in the candle. You have taken away my eggs,' she said, 'and eaten them—and what I am to do I can't tell.' " "Yes," said Thorfinn, who had been listening to all this; "and then she said that her children had taken away our boat." "Why," said Thorgils, "what's the meaning of this? Did you see the woman too, my lad?"

Thorgils nodded. "Yes, yes, I saw her. She showed her legs like a man, and she was *so* big round." He stretched his arms out to make a hoop. "Now," said Thorlaf, "you shall hear my dream. I was at home with you, and we were sitting at board. Thorny came in with a trencher on which were blocks of cheese. She went along the table dealing out the cheese, and when she came to me, she stayed awhile, picking over what was left, and then she gave me a piece with all the rind pared away. 'There's for you,' she said. It was a good cheese too, for I dreamed that I ate it." Thorgils said, "That's a lucky dream of yours. I read from it that we

shall go home again, and that you and Thorny will make a match of it." "I read it," Starkad said, "that we have got over the worst of our luck, and are now come down to the meaty part of it."

The luck of the day held, at any rate; for they were near enough now to the land to see the waves breaking on the cliffs. They made out Cape Farewell, thrusting out a flat green neb far into the sea, and kept that upon their lee. Thorgils intended to shelter in the firth which he had seen from the mountain-top, which lay as he thought just North of the Cape, and which, as he made out, was where Eric the Red had settled himself. He and his men were now very tired; but the tide served them, and though the wind had dropped there was no sea to speak of. Late at night they entered a great arm of the ocean between shelving shores covered with wood, and on the northern shore they stayed them, and made a tent for the night. They were lucky enough to find a spring of fresh water within reach.

Next morning they re-embarked, and pulled up the firth. They rowed until well into the afternoon, and began to see signs of habitancy.



“ We are come among men again, God be thanked,” Thorgils said. They saw wood, cut and corded; they saw a boat on the shore; presently they saw a boat-house built under the shelter of a spit of land, and round the point of that a ship, riding at anchor; and then a home-stead.

It brought the tears into Thorgils’ eyes to see so fair a sight as this: a timber house of broad eaves, smoke from a chimney in the midst of it, fields of ripe grain, a man reaping barley with a hook. In the yard of the house there was a girl hanging clothes on a line. A prick-eared dog came racing and barking down to the edge of the water, sat up there, high on his haunches, and watched them. “ We are saved alive from the desolation,” said Thorgils; and they pulled into the shore.

The reaper now came down to meet them. He and the voyagers stood at first looking at each other; then Thorgils said, “ Give you hail, master,” and the man answered in his own tongue. There was no need to ask whence they were come, for it was evident upon them.

Heriolf was this settler’s name; he was a Norwegian, and a good soul. He took them all up

to his little house; his wife and girls came out to greet them; very soon they were sitting at a board, and a bowl of milk in front of Thorfinn, not at all used to such food. There was much to say on both sides; but first of all they learned that Eric's settlement was not in this firth at all, but two days' sail northward of it. Heriolf had belonged there, but had got into trouble, and was now an outlaw. How was that? Well, he had killed a man for good cause—so he said—and had not been able to clear himself. He was well enough here, where he had been for two years now.

“But I would go back if I could,” he said. “There are very few here yet, good land though it be; and what men come are mostly here for the same reason as mine. Now a man may settle with himself whether or not he had cause to kill another man, but for all that he may not judge the case of others; nor need he desire the company of manslayers for the rest of his life. If I could inlaw myself again I would leave this place to-morrow.” Thorgils said that they might see about that by-and-by; and then, having told something of his adventures and misfortunes, asked whether Heriolf had

seen anything of his ship and the robbers on board her. Heriolf described a ship which had come in the summer before, but had not come ashore. So far as he knew there had been ten on board of her, but they said that they had lost some of their company in a gale. He described the master of the vessel in such a way that they thought it must be Snae-Coll himself. They had stayed a week and provisioned their ship, said Heriolf, and then had turned about and gone out to sea again. He had told them where the great settlement was. "You'll find them there, I expect." Thorgils said that there were accounts to be regulated with these men; and he thought that he should do his best to find Eric's firth before the summer was ended.

However, what with weariness of the sea and the hospitality of Heriolf and his family, and the fondness there grew up to be between the women and Thorfinn, they spent the winter at the homestead, and indeed the following spring and summer. Esteem grew between Thorgils and Heriolf, and a firm friendship. But after the next year's harvest Thorgils said that he must certainly be off.

Heriolf offered him his ship and all the stores

he would need, and Thorgils said that he couldn't refuse such a chance. "But how shall I repay you, my friend?" "As for that," said Heriolf, "you shall send me the price of her when you can; but there is a thing dearer to me than the money. If you can arrange for my return to the settlement with Eric the Red, you will repay me the value of five such ships as mine." "I'll do that," said Thorgils. "Eric and I are long acquaintances." "You won't find him he man he used to be," Heriolf told him. "He is something of a king in the settlement, and fond of his own way. But," he went on, "I shall have good luck from you, I know. You yourself, if I know anything of men, have a kind of greatness in you. You bear both fortunes equally well." Then, as the tale says, they blessed each other, and Thorgils sailed away out of the firth.

CHAPTER XV

THEY FIND ERIC THE RED

THEY came to the mouth of Eric's firth in October, just when winter had begun, and sailed up into the land until they met with signs of habitancy, which was a good twelve hours' sailing. There was good land on either side the firth, but not so good, Thorgils judged, as that which they had left. The mountains were higher, and the shores narrower; they saw great glaciers glittering in the sun which at midwinter would bring the ice hummocks down to the water's edge. Notwithstanding, it was a fine country, and the snow not yet thick upon it.

They came to the shipping, and a quay, berthed their ship, and prepared to go ashore. But before they were ready they saw another ship coming in behind them. She had the same wind, and was making for the same mooring-place. Thorgils knew her rig for a ship from home. "Good tidings!" he said, and sent off

Thorlaf and Col to meet her. They boarded the merchantman, on whose after-deck there sat a broad-shouldered man in red. Directly he saw them come on board he was up and came to meet them. "Hail!" he said, "and who may you be?" They told him their names, and in whose company they were. "Why," said the man, "this is fine news. I am Thorstan White, and am just come from your country. Is Thorgils aboard your vessel?" They said, Yes. "Then let me go and see him."

There was a good greeting between them, much to hear and learn. Thorstan said that he had been in Norway, expecting Thorlaf to come back; but when there was no sign of him he became uneasy and fitted out a ship with merchandise and sailed over to Iceland. He went up to Treadholt and found all well there. "Your brother Haering has all in hand, and holds his own well with Asgrim and his friends. He was uneasy about you, having heard nothing for four winters." "Is that all it is?" Thorgils said, "I had thought it had been twenty." Then he asked about Thorny. She was married, it seems, to a man called Bearne of the Pit, Thorstan Gode's son—this Thorstan Gode

being a new-comer. Thorgils said little about it, but was not greatly pleased with the news. "I could have found her a better husband," was all that he had to say.

But nothing could have been better than this meeting with Thorstan White. "I am lucky to have fallen in with you so soon," he said. "Now you are to make what use you will of me, of me and my gear. It is all at your service, as much as at my own. I tell you so fairly before these lads, and will never go back on my word."

Thorgils was touched. "I had forgotten, to my shame, what good friends I had. But it is true that we have known dark days." Thorstan asked him, What was the worst of all that he had felt? and for a time got no answer; but presently Thorgils told him. "To see that hut upon the wild shore standing still by itself, and to fear misfortune within it—that was bad. But nothing was worse than this, to have taken a beautiful girl from her foster mother, strong and fresh in her youth, and to see her lying dead in her cold bed, wasted and made old by misery before her time—that, Thorstan, made an old man of me; and I doubt I shall get over that.

Never yet have I forgotten the sight of her wide-open eyes, which had seen terror, and should see nothing else; and that child there groping upon her for the means of life.” “It was bad,” said Thorstan White, “yet you are alive, and the boy is alive.” “I have often wished he was not,” said Thorgils, but told nothing of how near Thorfinn had been to death since then.

They stayed for the night where they were, and in the morning weighed anchor and rowed the ships further up the firth; for Eric did not live by that haven, but in another, where he had a large settlement, and lived in a fine stone house, like an Earl. The two ships went up together, and found Eric’s haven, and a town built there. Then they unloaded the merchandise, and stored it, and went into the market to see the inhabitants. They found numbers of acquaintances, who gave Thorgils a good greeting. News of him soon reached Eric the Red, sitting in his hall and hearing lawsuits. “Bid him come to me,” said the great man, and went on with his lawsuits. Thorgils, who was both busy and interested, received the message, but didn’t answer it other than by saying, “I will

see him by-and-by." It is thought that Eric was offended, but it may be that Thorgils himself was so. The fact is that the two men, who had been four years, since the summons, in coming together, did not hit it off with each other when they met.

Outwardly there was some show of cordiality. Thorgils went into the stone house when Eric and some of his friends were sitting there, waiting for supper. All men stood up to meet him, except Eric himself. He called out, "Hail to you, traveller," before he drank. Thorgils, whose leanness made him appear both older and taller than he really was, walked up to the high seat, looking neither to right nor left of him. When he came to where Eric was sitting he greeted him well. "You have taken your time, neighbour," says Eric. "It has taken me more than time," said Thorgils. "Meat off your bones, my friend," says Eric, "and company to boot." Thorgils said nothing more, but when they sat to supper Eric gave him the next seat to himself; Thorstan White sat next, then Thorlaf, Col, and Starkad. They made merry, and most of them talked at once; but Thorgils, who was never much of a talker, said little. No

doubt he felt that he had come a long journey for very little; and no doubt his mind ran upon the two graves side by side in the desert bay.

But he told Eric of the misfortunes which had befallen him, and got some news which he wanted. Eric said, "Those rascals of yours are in this country. I have heard tell of them, though they weren't so hardy as to come here. Their ship came in last fall; they sent a man ashore for victual and drink, chiefly drink. They said that they were from Iceland, but had lost their bearings in a storm, been driven on to the Seal Islands, held there all the summer. The master of the vessel had died out there, they said, and several more of the company. They sold two girls in the market, and were off before I could come at them to ask for news of you. They went up the firth—and took up some land in settlement, I believe. It would be worth your while to go up there one of these days. They may be the very men." "They may be," said Thorgils—but seemed to take no great interest in them.

Thorgils built himself a house against the winter, and took himself into it with Thorfinn, and the three young men, who would not leave

him. Starkad married a daughter of Thorstan White called Bergthora. She kept house for the five of them. They did not see much of Eric the Red, who nevertheless was always urging Thorgils to take up land and settle there. Thorgils said that there was no hurry about that. The land would not run away; whereas he might. Anyhow, he said, he would look about him; and if he saw anything which tempted him, they could talk about it afterwards. "There's no man I would sooner have on my land than yourself," Eric said, and made Thorgils raise one of his eyebrows. He didn't see the use of saying anything; but his thought was, that no land which he took would be Eric's land. It would be Thorgils' land, according to his notion.

The house he had built for himself stood outside the town, towards the mountains. They began to rise about six hours' journey away. That winter, as it happened, much damage was done to flocks by a white bear, which had come down the glacier and lay about in the daytime. No man could find him, and a price was set upon his carcass, which was levied on all the settlers. He was out there all the winter, and the damage

done was serious. It was getting well on towards the spring, though the snow was still heavily on the land, when Thorstan White and a number of the townspeople were up at Thorgils' house. A ship had come in, and the Chapman had stored their goods in the bower up there. One morning when they were all in the store-house, cheapening the merchandise, Thorfinn, who had been running to and fro between house and bower, peered into the place and called, "Father, father!"

Thorgils looked up from his affair. "What now, my son?"

"Oh, father," said Thorfinn, "there's such a great dog out here in the garth. You never saw. He's as fat as fat, and yellow all over—and no tail to him."

Thorgils had no suspicions. "Never you mind it, lad," he said; "but you had better stop in here. Don't go out, but leave the dog alone."

He went on with his reckoning; but presently he heard a cry from outside.

"Oh, oh—he's taking me away!"

They all sprang round, and in a flash Thorgils knew what the dog must be. He drew Earth-house-prey—which had never left him

yet—and ran out of the bower. They all made way for him. Then he saw the great flat-headed beast, squatting on his hams in the snow, and Thorfinn like a girl's doll in his black mouth. He was wagging his fond head about, and the child looked to be dead.

Thorgils turned sick with fear, and then his anger rose in him like a tide of hot water. He was close upon them in a moment and hewed at the bear with all his might. He hit him on the flat of his skull between the ears—and split it open. The huge creature fell in a huddle of fur and meat, and Thorfinn dropped out of his mouth. He was insensible, but had no bones broken, and no hurt to speak of beyond some bruises. Thorgils, who hardly knew what he had done, carried the child into the house and stayed with him until he had recovered himself; but all the others gathered about the bear, and one of them pelted off to spread the news in the town.

There was high excitement over it, and Thorgils' fame grew beyond belief. That same day a number of the people about came up with their share of the bear-money. They told the news to Eric the Red, who showed himself true to his

name over it. At first he was quite put out. "Well, well—and what is it to me? I never supposed the man was in his dotage." But he sent some of his people down to have the beast cut up. Thorgils had the skin and the teeth, as his due. Later on Eric seemed to make little of the affair, saying that a woman would have done as much as that in defence of her child. Thorstan White then said, "Yes, and have been mauled for her pains. It takes a man and a sword to split a bear's skull in two." Eric nodded, looking as if he was thinking of something more important. Following his lead, many of those about him made light of Thorgils and his renown; others took the other side, and the talk grew high. The one who said least about it was Thorgils himself; but it is probable that he knew everything that was debated, and certain that he was aware of the coolness growing between Eric and himself. As often happens, a growing coolness is apt to break suddenly into a flame of heat. So it did now.

CHAPTER XVI

COL INVOLVED AGAIN

ERIC the Red declared that he was sick and tired of the bear and Thorgils' glory; but in spite of that men talked round about it, having little else to do before the spring weather broke up the ice in the firth. At such times of year as this, between the stern winter and the grace of the warm rain, men hang about the hall, drinking more than they need, and talking louder than they ought. Col, Thorlaf, and Starkad always kept together; they had a strong following among the sons and friends of Thorstan White. On the other side were Eric's followers and servants. They were fond of matching one champion against another—all tongue-work—and weren't too particular what they said. So it was that Thorgils was set up against Eric and the tales climbed as high as the church-steeple. A man called Hall, a servant of Eric's, grew very bitter over it, and

scoffed the pretensions of Thorgils. "What does it amount to, when all's said? That he has been shipwrecked, and lost his wife, lost his ship, lost his thralls, and come in here with the clothes he stands up in not his own. And you set a man like that against Eric the Red, who has harried in England as far as Dovercourt, and is feared half over Scotland and in all the Isles! What has your man done but kill a bear to save a baby? That is a woman's business—and to see him with that child, upon my soul, you would hardly know whether he is man or woman." This he said in a blustering voice, rather thick with beer and anger. Col grew very red, and showed him hot eyes. "You lie, and know that you are a liar," he said. "Now repeat your lie." Hall stared at him, and grew red in turn. "That I will," he said—and did repeat that Thorgils was like an old woman. It was his last word, for Col, who had been leaning on a spear as he stood by the open door, now drove it through Hall's neck and killed him on the spot.

There was a great uproar, and men took to their weapons, and parted off into sides. In

the middle of it Eric the Red came in, saw the body of Hall lying in a pool of blood, and asked who had dared to do this. Col avowed his deed. Then Eric was in a great rage. "Take that fellow," he said to his people, "and bind him." The Thorgils party all stood about Col, protecting him. In the midst of the bustle and preparation for battle Thorgils walked into the hall. He was very quiet; as he always was in these days. "You seem to be busy," he said. "What's the matter here?"

All gave place to him, as if he had been directly concerned in the affair; then, lying in their midst he saw the dead man. "There has been some mischief here," he said. "Who has done this?" They cried Col's name to him, and by degrees he came to understand what had caused Hall's death. Then Eric, having seated himself in his high seat, shouted for silence, and said, "I have given orders that your man Col be taken and bound, that right may be done." He looked at Thorgils sternly as he said it.

Thorgils said, "It is not for me to deny your right to weregeld; but this much I will say, that if anybody is to avenge the death of your serv-

ant, Eric, it is yourself. You give yourself the airs of a King or Earl out here; but you are no King or Earl over me and my friends, but a settler in a new land. Give no orders, then, for you will not be obeyed, but rather get out of that seat of yours and come down and do what you deem fitting. You will find me here ready for you, as I always have been, whether for peace or for strife."

Eric grew very red, and said something about impudence which must be taught its place. "What is to prevent me from dealing with you as my powers warrant, do you suppose?" he asked. Thorgils' answer was a good one. It was not in words; but he looked down upon the pommel of Earth-house-prey at his thigh. He did not even put his hand to the sword. It was enough that he looked at it. It was, at least, enough for the men crowded in the hall, who had no desire to see the new settlement cloven by war. They collected about Eric now, and reasoned with him, while Thorgils stood his ground, and men who had been wavering hitherto came over silently to his side. What they knew about Thorgils was this, that he was slow to wrath, but quite without fear. What they

knew about Eric was—what it may have been. He had carried matters with a high hand so far in Greenland, and men had acquiesced in his dealings because no one of them had seen his way to question them. Now there stood a man out before him with flat and plain questions, and the greater part of them thought that Thorgils was right. It was a matter now between Eric and him. Let Eric fight his own quarrel, but not sit in a chair and give orders. It may be that Eric did not incline to a wager of battle with such a man as Thorgils, and the less so seeing that he had more friends than had been looked for. In the upshot the affair was settled between them on reasonable terms, and peace was openly declared. But Thorgils had now made up his mind to go home.

Two things delayed him. One was to obtain the inlawry of Heriolf, his friend of the distant firth, and the other was a reckoning with Snae-Coll the thrall and his gang of murderers. The first matter was not hard. He argued it out with Eric and his advisers, pledging himself as surety for Heriolf's peaceable behaviour. He had the satisfaction of seeing a ship sail to

bring the man home, but did not stay himself to welcome him. He was now impatient to see Iceland again. But he had work left him to do before he could think of that.

CHAPTER XVII

THE END OF THE THRALLS

HE took counsel with Thorstan White, whose advice was that he should not kill the thralls when he had found them; but he would say nothing about that. Then Thorstan said that he would go with him, since he knew within a little just where they would have settled; and Thorgils said Yes to that, very heartily. So they set out to go up the firth in a longboat, and after they had passed through a forest country on both sides of the water they came to a belt of good land, watered by a river which flowed out of a glacier, and after that to a broad creek. They rowed up the creek for two hours, and then saw a homestead lying in meadows. There was a landing-stage and boat moored alongside it. Thorgils knew it at once. It was the boat which had come with him out of Iceland. There were no signs of his ship, however.

They left Thorlaf in the boat, and went on

shore. Some women were working in the mead by the house, and a man lying on a wall watching them. A dog barked, and the man looked up and saw them. Presently he slipped off the wall on the further side of it, but Thorgils noticed that he was still there; he could see the peak of his hood over the wall. The party continued its way and reached the wall which bounded the mead towards the water. The women ceased work and stood up to watch them; but the man behind the wall stooped and ran, and presently they saw him running across the garth towards the house. Col saw him go—but Thorgils said he had seen it already and knew who it was.

Now the women came to them, with very few words which could be understood. They were fat women, with broad, brown faces, who looked to be both good-tempered and foolish. They used strange gestures, sweeping with their arms. Their legs were not hidden as most women's are, but swathed in sacking. Thorgils supposed them to have been taken from the Seal Islands, and felt sorry for them, but he went through the midst of them with his party, straight for the house.

They knocked at the door, and having no answer, tried it, and found it to be bolted. All the women now came about them with loud cries and protestations; but Thorgils had found a heavy balk of timber with which he broke down the door. Then they went into the house, but at first saw nobody about. It was close inside and smelt very foul. They started to ransack, and presently Starkad called to Thorgils that he had them. There was laughter in his voice. Thorgils went to where he was, and then he too saw them.

They were all together—eight of them—in one great bed. He saw them billowing under the coverings like moles underground. Then Starkad pulled back the blankets and discovered them all huddled together. They did not move.

Thorgils, whose eyes were shining cold, had Earth-house-prey drawn in his hand, and lifted it up. Whether he changed his purpose in the very act to smite, or whether he had from the first meant to do what he did, the tale does not tell. He brought the sword down flatways upon the buttocks of one of them, and they all jumped up and knelt on the bed. Thorgils said, “Come

out of that," and one by one they got off the bed and knelt to him on the floor.

Thorgils said to Col, " Tie them up." Snae-Coll, who was the murderer, took it worse than the rest, for he seemed to go mad. He howled like a dog and gibbered nonsense; but they had a short way with that, and soon had him as quiet as the rest of them. They were all tied up and left, while Thorgils and Thorstan went over the house and collected what there was of value. There was money, a good deal of stock, some of his own furnishings, such as bed-clothes, tools, and clothing, and some fine furs. When all this was stowed aboard Thorgils came back to the house, where Col kept watch upon the thralls. He had still his sword in his hand, but he did not mean to use it.

He spoke. " Snae-Coll and you other thieves who murder women, listen to me. I shall not kill you, because that would be too good a thing for you. A flash and one pang of fear, and then you are at rest. No, but you shall live and be wretched. Thralls you were, and thralls' work is what you have done; thralls you shall be henceforward. Now get up, and down to the water."

They rose to their feet, white and dazed with fear, and he drove them before him down to the water's edge. There one by one they got into the boat and huddled together in the bows. Then they rowed away down the firth. He had left the women behind with a sufficiency of stock to keep them through the winter. They would fare better there, he thought, than in Eric's haven. It was clear that they had done all the work of the farm for their masters. Now they should do it for themselves and their children. So far as appeared they did not regret anything. Some of them waved farewell, and they all stood watching the boat out of sight; but when they were round the bend and had another view of the homestead, there they all were out in the mead again. Thorgils saw smoke coming from the chimney, too. "They will do well enough," he said.

The end of the thralls was that he sold them all in the market the day after he had landed them. Thorstan said that he had been merciful, but Thorgils shook his head over that. "Nay," he said, "I had been merciful to kill them all outright; but it was not a case for

mercy. You have not seen what I saw out in the wilderness."

Now he decided to make ready for sailing; and Thorstan White said that he should go home with him. Starkad, who had married a wife and now had a child, made up his mind to stop in Greenland for a while. Thorlaf and Col said that they should go home with Thorgils.

CHAPTER XVIII

HARROWING OF THE SEA

THE winter set in early that year and caught Thorgils at his preparations.

They had to wait for the year to turn, but set out as early as they dared—and too early as it turned out; for though the ice was broken up and they had a fair lead, the winter storms were not over.

For two days they had smooth water with the wind upon their quarter, and then they had sight of their own land. They were in high spirits and full of hopefulness. But the wind died away and they lay adrift, waiting for what was to come. The wind veered round to the North and gradually increased in force until it blew a gale. Close-hauled as they were, they could make no way. So it blew hard for twelve days, and they drove before it, whither they knew not. They suffered sorely from the cold; for there came much snow.

But this was not the worst of it. They were

many days out of their course, and the child Thorfinn very sick with the cold; but when the northerly gale had blown itself out, and they had, with infinite labour, repaired their tackling and got things ordered again, now it began to blow out of the South-west, and increased to the worst storm any of them had ever seen. The waves rolling in from the ocean were like mountains of green water. The main-mast carried away, and the ship filled dangerously, and must sink but for incessant baling. For two days they baled; and then the storm grew to a height, and billow after billow broke over them. Eight huge waves came over them, and still they baled for mere life. Then came a ninth wave, and that the biggest of them all. It struck Thorgils full in the back and drove him from the helm. Thorfinn had been between his knees; but when Thorgils was seen again in the volume of that water, Thorfinn was not with him. His father's grey face was a pity to see—but just then the backwash of the wave threw Thorfinn on board again. Thorgils clasped him with a cry and held him close. Thorfinn was as brave as could be. “That was a brimmer, father!” he said; and his eyes laughed. But Thorgils

had no laughter in him. "Bale as you may," he said, but he himself had no more care for sea or land.

Yet they saved the ship, and by nightfall were under the shelter of the land again; but that was a night of sorrow. Thorfinn had high fever, and began to throw up blood. He talked wildly, without sense, knew nobody, and towards morning died in his father's arms.

Thorgils sat quite still in a stare, holding the dead child. He saw nobody, and said nothing at all. They left him alone, thinking that the best way, and busied themselves with the ship. They rigged up a mast with a lug-sail and made the best they could. All men worked well; but Thorlaf seemed to take direction over the others. In thirty hours' sailing they made out Hiarlaf's head, and rounding that dropped anchor in Arnarbel's Oyce, where the white water comes into the sea. There was snug lying there, and it was not far from their own country.

Thorgils, since his boy's death, had not moved or spoken, nor had he eaten anything. He just sat up stiffly, staring with blank eyes into the distance, with Thorfinn's body on his

knees. But his friends were now much troubled about him. They believed that sorrow had robbed him of his wits; they expected that he would resist with frenzy any attempt they might make to land the dead child and bury him; and yet such an attempt must be made.

There were men on the shore now, looking at the ship, and a boat was putting off with people on board. Thorstan said that he would pull out to meet them. Then he thought of what might be done to rouse Thorgils. "I will seem to dispute with those men about the harbour-dues; we will have a tussle. It shall look as if we were come to fighting. Now when you see us all struggling together, do you cry out to Thorgils, 'Help, rescue—Thorstan is taken.' That will move him. He will come ashore in one of their boats—and while he is composing the quarrel, you shall pick up the child and carry him to the church. He will be in a great rage with you; but that will make no matter so that he recovers his senses." Thorlaf agreed to that, and Thorstan rowed ashore, meeting the boats half-way across and turning them back with him—or some of them. After a while they on the ship saw what seemed to be a fight going

on. Thorlaf ran to Thorgils with the alarm, and the afflicted man awoke. He gave a moment's flash of the eyes to the shore, then got up and, still carrying Thorfinn, went down the side into one of the boats. He covered the body with a cloak just as if it was alive.

They came close to land, and Thorgils jumped into the water and waded ashore. The same moment Thorlaf turned the boat's head, and they rowed across the river to the church. Before Thorgils could come at them again Thorfinn was buried. Col and Thorlaf did it together, with the priest of the church, and they stayed in the priest's house to see how Thorgils would deal with them. They knew that they had taken a great risk, and that it might go hard with them.

The quarrel, of course, which had been no quarrel at all, ceased when Thorgils came into it. Then he was for going back to the boat, and it seemed as if his fit had come on him again. He had had neither food nor sleep for two days, and looked an old man. He showed no pleasure in being at home again, among men who wished him well; he did not ask after his daughter whom he had left just hereabouts five years ago.

All his thoughts were centred in Thorfinn, whom he considered as alive and waiting for him.

They told him then what had been done. For a long time he could not understand them; but when he did he grew terribly angry and vowed that Col's life should pay for it. Col had killed Thorfinn, he said, and Col should die. Nothing would stop him from taking boat; so he was rowed across the river and stalked up to the churchyard, Earth-house-prey in his hand. The priest came out to meet him. "Give me the slayer of my boy," he said; and the priest replied, "That cannot be, Thorgils. It was God who slew your son, and He is not at my dispose." "It was Col who killed him," said Thorgils; "I know that very well." "It was Col who did for you that which you ought to have done," said the priest. "Come, I will take you to your boy's grave." Thorgils, in a stare, allowed himself to be led by the hand. He stood looking at the grave quietly; and then they saw that his eyes were full of tears. They let him weep as he would, but presently Col and Thorlaf came out of the house behind him and stood by his side, without saying anything. For some

time he was not aware of them, but when he turned his eyes and saw them both there, he had no remembrance of the rage which had brought him to the grave, with the intent of filling another grave. He looked kindly on them, with his eyes all wet, and put his hand on Col's shoulder, and leaned hard on him. They took him away presently, and then he ate and drank, and afterwards lay down and slept.

The fit was off him, and he resumed hold upon life, such of it as was left to him; but it was evident to those who had known him so long and seen him so intimately that he was aged by ten years in the two days since Thorfinn died. For one thing, he had become more peremptory, more arbitrary in his dealings with men, and much more irritable than he had been wont to be. That showed itself as soon as he was at home.

CHAPTER XIX

TREADHOLT AGAIN

THEY sailed away from Olvus soon afterwards, and came into their own waters about mid-May, and from the sea had a sight of Treadholt among its green meads. Eyjafell was still deeply mantled in snow, there were no leaves on the trees; but the river ran brimmingly, and they could see lambs in the home-meadows.

For all this Thorgils had a sombre regard. He saw, but did not look. It was Col who pointed places out to Thorlaf, or Thorlaf to Col, and both of them made the most of their land for Thorstan White's advantage. They left Thorgils very much to himself, and that was all he asked of them. Yet when they came into Cogsound, and friends on the quay hailed them, or presently, when a crowd of them came aboard—and Haering his brother one of them—his heart warmed to the welcome he received, and he spoke like himself again. There was much

to tell and little of it good; yet it was a relief to him to speak freely of Thorey's end and of Gudrun's, even to confess the bitterness of his heart when, at the very last, his boy was taken from him whom he had been at such desperate pains to keep alive. In time he did come to speak of that, not making much of his own misery—for that was not his way; telling rather of the lad's high heart and pretty ways, and leaving all the rest to be understood by them who heard him.

Haering gave good reports of his husbandry at Treadholt. "You will find all in order, brother, and can take it over from the moment you cross the threshold." Thorgils said there was no hurry about that, but there would be accounts to settle, and the matter of Thorny's marriage to be gone into. He wanted to know more about Bearne of the Pit, and seemed fidgety over the whole affair. As soon as might be they all went over to Treadholt, where Thorstan White would stay through the summer while he was looking about him. Loft, now a very old man, came out to meet them a mile short of Treadholt. He wept when he saw Thorgils again, and treated him as if he were the elder

of the two, being indeed almost childish himself. Thorgils embraced him warmly, and walked with him up the road, old Loft taking his arm to help him along. Then came out Haering's wife and three sons, fine lads, to join the party—and that was a happy meeting because Thorgils loved children and was at his best with them. After a time Thorlaf and Col went up to Calfholt, to take possession of that on Col's account as heir of his father Iostan—but that was not for some days. There was a great feast at Treadholt first, to which all the neighbours came, and among them Bearne of the Pit, and Thorny, the last alive of Thorgils' children.

For what reason is not to be known, but Thorgils took immediate dislike of Bearne, who was most earnest to please his father-in-law and signally failed to do it, perhaps for that very reason. Bearne was a stoutish man, with a round, red face, and rather small, anxious eyes which watered freely. Thorgils judged him a time-server, which perhaps he was. Thorny was a handsome girl, after the fashion of her mother, slim and very upright, with hair lighter than her skin. She had not the deep-blue eyes of Thorey, nor her look of truth and courage—

though she had plenty of both—but she was a handsome girl, a great deal younger than Bearne, who had been married before and had a daughter at home. Thorny had a child, whom she brought with her, a boy called Thorolf.

Haering was host, for Thorgils would take over nothing yet awhile, and, being a munificent man, offered great hospitality on all hands. The whole countryside came up to Treadholt and sat there for a week. Thorgils was very affable and talked freely to those whom he knew or knew of; but to Bearne, of whom he knew next to nothing, he was measured in his civility, and well on this side of cordiality. The more he held off the more Bearne paid court to him. He was a foolish man, who did not know what he owed to himself; and so it went on until one fine day Thorgils lost his temper and said, “I wish that you would leave me alone. You have married my daughter, and that ought to be enough for you. My agreement was not to be looked for, placed as I was; but it seems to me that you have got so much the best of the bargain that a little modesty would become you very well.” Bearne was much dismayed and asked his wife what he had

better do. "It occurs to me," he said, "that I have been insulted, which is rather hard to bear, and must be more trying to you than to me, I should think. I think your father has left his temper as well as his family in Greenland." Then he wiped his eyes and blinked at Thorny. She said, "Why can't you leave my father alone? He knows nothing of you, and you might have seen that he makes friendships slowly. There is something against you I know. It may be that your eyes are always on the drip." Bearne said that it was hard that a man's infirmities should be cast up against him, but Thorny said, "Well, then be careful not to cast theirs up against other men." But Bearne was unhappy when he was in the company of people who did not love him, and took his wife away as soon as he could.

After he had gone Thorgils spoke his mind to Haering. "One thing displeases me, brother, in your ruling of my business, and that is your handing Thorny over to that weeper. He overwept your foresight, and sluiced your pockets of more than you should have kept there for his washings. My meaning is that you endowed her for more than the man was worth.

I think that he overreached you, and owe him a grudge for that.” Haering justified himself, but said that he would readily pay back whatever Thorgils thought laid out in excess of reason. Thorgils would not hear of it. “ It is not your money that I am after, but my own,” he said; “ but now we will leave it. I shall have time enough to reach an understanding with the bleary one. Let him sop his eyes with my napkins while he can.”

Thorstan White, who was a great trader, did not stay out the summer at Treadholt, but was there just long enough to fit out a ship. He said he should go to Norway and might be back in the following summer. Thorgils sped him outward with great good will, and they parted firm friends. After that he remained quietly at home throughout the winter, revolving many things in his mind. He seemed to be in the trough between manhood and old age; but as it turned out he was rather renewing his strength. He was not yet fifty years old.

In the spring the Thing was held at Arness, and all the chief men of the country rode to it. It was a long journey from Treadholt, seeing Arness lies across Rang-river Vales, on Thurso

Water; but nevertheless Thorgils went, and a goodly company with him.

He reached the place late, and went at once to the booth which had been prepared for him. They told him that his son-in-law and Thorny were there, and he heard it grimly. "I wish them joy of it," was all he said; nor would he go to visit them, nor did they venture to come over to him. Thorny was as sharp as all women are who know things otherwise than by the ears or eyes. She understood that there was soreness in her father's mind, not caused by that in her husband's eyes. Bearne was very uneasy, and caught sight of Thorgils more than once at the assemblies. He waited upon him patiently with his eyes, but Thorgils made as though he was unconscious of him. However—he was not at all unconscious.

One morning, after he had been there nearly a week, he took his sword in his hand, and went directly to Bearne's booth. Thorny saw him coming, and a bright light came into her eyes. "My father is coming here," she said to her husband. "Up now and go to meet him, and behave yourself like a man. Wipe your eyes first, for the love of goodness. I can see that

his anger has come to a head. All now depends upon you." Bearne was rather flustered, but took hold of himself and went to the booth door. He saw Thorgils coming on like a strong wind; he went out bare-headed and weaponless to meet him. "Hail, kinsman," he said; "this is what I have been hoping for. Now I ask you to take up your lodging with us for as long as may please you. I only wish to serve you, and all I have is at your disposition if you will use it." Thorgils stopped short and listened to him. Bearne had his hand out. His anger fell off him like a cloak. "You speak well," he said, "and I accept your offer. The fact is that I was coming in a great rage, and don't know what might have happened." Bearne said that he was very sorry to have displeased him, and that he hoped he would stay with them at the Pit. "When you are there," he said, "you shall look over all that I have, and what you please to take away with you, that you shall have and welcome." Thorgils laughed quietly and patted Bearne on the shoulder. Then they went into the booth and he gave Thorny a kiss, and seemed glad to be with her.

When the Thing was over Thorgils rode with

Bearne and Thorny to Pit, which was the name of Bearne's homestead. He saw everything they had and approved of it. Thorny told him that it was all his if he chose to take it: "All came from you, and shall go back again at your will." Thorgils, without moving a muscle, said that he would look over the stock and take what seemed fair; and when he went through it all with Bearne he did set aside twenty cows and a six-score ewes as his when he called for them. To this Bearne assented, and presently Thorgils rode home to Treadholt. In due time he sent men over to Pit to get in the stock he had marked. It came in, and with it came Thorny herself with a child at the breast. "What is this, my child?" "Father," she said, "it seems to me that you are set against my husband, and regret that I was given to him at all. Now, if you will have me, I will separate from him and stay here with you; and you can have all my dowry back again whenever you wish. So says Bearne himself."

Thorgils was much affected by her meekness, and gave her his blessing. "A blessing on you, and on Bearne as well," he said. "You are good souls, and I have tried you over hard. I

own that I thought he had overreached them that had you in charge; but that doubt of mine soon left me. He met me at Arness like a man, and when I went to Pit I only acted so to try him. Now you shall take all this back home with you, and be sure that I shall never part you two. Tell Bearne that he and I shall be good friends after this; for I never forget the goodness in a man, whatever I may do with his badness."

So that trouble was all smoothed over, and Thorgils lived at ease, but very lonely.

CHAPTER XX

HELGA, THORORD'S DAUGHTER

HE bore his loneliness as long as he could, but found himself getting older; and the older he grew the less he liked being alone. What he remembered chiefly about Thorey now was her presence about the house, how good she was to look at, how pleasant the sound of her voice. A man, he thought, lost the savour of the good things of this life by having them unseasoned by a woman's grace on them. At one time he thought of taking Thörny at her word and having her and Bearne to live with him. But he gave that up very soon. He was fond of Thorny, and fond of Bearne too, a faithful man; but he knew himself. Small things vexed him, and to see a man always wiping his eyes would have led to no good. "I should try to mend his sore eyes, and fail, and hate them worse than before." Then he thought of marrying again, and the more he thought of it the

more he liked the thought. He would be very good to her; he knew that. She would be like a daughter to him—and yet by no means a daughter. And there would be children, without which a woman was nought, and a house less than nought. Yes, he would get him a wife. It was not at all too late.

He went over to Pit and talked to Bearne about it. "Bearne," he said, "you have found yourself a good wife. Now find one for me." Bearne gazed out of his watery eyes for a little while, and then told him that the girl was found. "And who is she?" "She is Helga, Thorord's daughter," said Bearne, "a girl of a thousand. A fat girl and very good-tempered." Thorgils said that she sounded promising. "You shall see her," Bearne said. "We will go to Shale in the morning. Thorord lives near Shale. He is priest of Olvus, and is a relative of mine by the mother's side. The trouble will be, not with Thorord, who is a reasonable man, but rather with Shafto, the girl's brother."

"And what is the matter with Shafto?"

Bearne looked serious. "He is leagued with Asgrim Ellida-Grimsson, and Asgrim rather favours the girl himself."

“ He is always crossing my road,” said Thorgils, “ or he used to be. But I don’t doubt I can deal with Shafto. How old is your Helga? ”

“ She will be seventeen, I daresay,” says Bearne.

“ Well, we will see her,” Thorgils said. “ There will be no harm done. And she may be too fat.”

“ Not a bit of it,” said Bearne. “ They can’t be that.”

Whether Bearne, in his anxiety to stand well with Thorgils, busied himself in the affair beforehand or not, he and Thorgils were received at Shale with much more interest than a simple visit would have warranted. Thorord was a plain and bluff sort of man, but his son Shafto had a scowling brow which was freely at work just now. They saw Helga before supper, but not to speak to, as she was busy. She was plump rather than fat, and had a pretty, fresh-coloured face, fair hair, and light-blue eyes. The excitement of the moment—visitors with all sorts of implication in their coming—was very becoming to her. Thorgils in his quiet way watched her and knew all about it. He thought

to himself, If a girl could always contrive to be on the edge of an asking in marriage, how her beauty would be enhanced!

After supper was over—at which she had served the guests and her father—she came and sat beside Thorord and listened to the talk. It should have interested her, for Thorgils was relating his adventures in the wilderness; but it did not. She was judging the speaker all the while, this sad-faced, thin and very tall man whom she guessed to be as old as her father. All her pretty fluster died away; she didn't want to marry him at all. Her other suitor, whom she had never seen, Asgrim Ellida-Grims-son, must be the better match. Everybody had something to say of his great way of life, and she understood too that he wore splendid clothes, and that his horse had fine trappings. He was a nobleman, and looked it, or so they said. This man of the quiet voice might be noble also, but there was no sign of it about him. He was grey, very thin; his doublet was shabby, threadbare in places. He talked to the company at large, so far as she could see, never looked at her at all. She could never have guessed at the depths of him even if she had wished to guess at

it—which she did not. By-and-by she grew very depressing, and slipping out of her father's arm left the men to themselves, and went rather unhappily to bed. Shafto found her pouting and red-eyed next day and did his best for his friend Asgrim; but in the meantime Thorgils had asked for her, and her father was inclined towards him on all sorts of grounds.

Thorgils rode away home thinking much of Helga. "Before I know it I shall be in love with that good-temperd, comfortable girl," he told Bearne. "I don't believe that I shall ever love a woman again as I loved Thorey, and I don't believe that I shall ever again meet with such a woman as she was. Your Thorny comes near her, but not to reach the edge of her shadow. Yet this girl pleases me, and I hope that you will settle the business for me, Bearne."

Bearne said, "Leave it for a little. There's much to be done. Young Shafto will be a great obstacle. I can see he don't care about it, and that he means to get the girl on his side. We will talk it all over at the Thing, and it may be useful to make Shafto more aware of you than he is just now." Thorgils smiled and rather

stretched his smile. “ I am thinking that I can deal with Shafto,” he said.

Nothing more was attempted until the Thing at midsummer, and then Thorgils spoke to Thorord again, and Thorord seemed to favour him strongly. Shafto kept out of the way, and bestowed himself in Asgrim’s booth. When Thorgils had come to an understanding with Thorord, as he thought, he now saw Asgrim and Shafto always in the booth where Thorord lodged, and guessed what was going on. Next time he mentioned his business to Thorord, the man had cooled off. Thorgils became angry, and said that he would wring Shafto’s neck for him.

A ship came in to Einar’s haven that summer. Bearne of the Pit told Thorgils about it. He had had the news from Shale, and said that Shafto was going over to see what was to be seen. Thorgils said, “ Right. He shall see me, at any rate.” He went to the haven with Col and three other men, crossed the ferry and stood on the other side waiting. By-and-by Shafto came riding down to the ferry with some men with him. He saw the horses feeding on the other side, and that they had saddles on them.

“ Whose horses? ” He was told, Thorgils’ of Treadholt. “ Oh, ” said Shafto; “ and where is Thorgils of Treadholt himself? ” “ He is thereabouts in the brushwood, ” he was told. “ I think he waits for an enemy. It looks like that. ” Shafto turned to his men and told them that they had better get back home. “ I have been talking to the ferryman, and hear that the goods are going very dear just now. Later on the prices will be better, but if we go over now they will be sure to keep them up, thinking we are eager. ” They went home then, but everybody had seen the horses across the river, and knew whose they were, and all about it.

Thorord said that he had known how it would be. “ You and your handsome friend Asgrim will get me into trouble with that Viking, ” he told Shafto. “ Do you think we can go on like this, not daring to cross our own river? He shall have Helga as soon as he pleases for me. I seem to know the man. He is slow to rouse, but not to be turned from his purpose by anything you can do. Now Asgrim’s not that kind. You can pay Asgrim for an affront with a good present, and he will think no more about it. But Thorgils would take nothing but the one thing. ”

After that he sent word to Thorgils that the betrothal should be when he pleased, and the wedding at Shale before the winter; and so it was done. Helga was in very low spirits about it, and as well as that dreadfully frightened of Thorgils. It was not a happy beginning.

When they came home to Treadholt there was a feast, and everybody paid court to the bride, except, it seemed, the bridegroom. He was in one of his silent moods, and had very little to say. Helga was happy enough while the guests were there; but when she was alone with her husband she did not seem able to say a word to him. However, she was his wife now, and certainly he was kind to her; but it hadn't turned out as he expected. He thought that she would have been as happy and lighthearted bustling about Treadholt as he had seen her at Shale. Nothing of the kind! He was disappointed, and showed that he was. That made her worse.

It went on very badly all through the summer, and towards the winter, but before it had begun to snow Helga thought that she could bear herself no longer. So one day, when Thorgils was out on the fells rounding up sheep, she

told one of the servants that she was going over to Shale, and that he must saddle two horses, as she would want him to come with her. She rode accompanied as far as the house, and being come to the garth gate, Helga got down, and told the man to return with both the horses, as she was going to stay there. And so she did, though Thorord blamed her and said that she must take the consequences, whatever they were. Shafto said she had done right; and Helga herself felt sure that Thorgils would never claim her again. "He looks on me as one of the servant-maids," she said, "and doesn't know one of us from the other." Thorord told her that that was nonsense. "Thorgils is not the man to take one of his servant-maids in his arms." Helga, tossing her head, said that it might come to that. "He can do very well without me there, you will see."

She was at home for several days without any message from Treadholt, and then there came an evening when they were sitting at board, and heard a horse outside in the garth; then presently a single thump at the door. It was opened by one of the hinds, and Thorgils came into the hall.

He looked a great warrior, having a helm on his head, and his sword Earth-house-prey in his hand. He took no notice of anybody as he walked up the hall; neither saluted Thorord nor any one else. He walked by them all to where Helga was sitting and took her by the wrist. She rose as he did it, and made no resistance to him. He led her out of the house and into the yard where his horse was standing, lifted her quite easily and put her in the saddle; then mounted himself behind her and rode away. There had been that about him which had held every one still in his place to see what he was going to do; but when he was sure, Shafto, very red in the face, got up and asked his father that some of them might go after him. Thorord, angry, scoffed at him. "A pretty sight you would be, following a man like him, keeping your distance, and not daring to diminish it by half a yard. That is how finches follow a kite, I think. Keep out of the man's way, and deem yourself lucky that he don't send for you to know what you want to do, meddling with his affairs. And what is it that you suppose yourself to be doing, I should like to know? He came after his own, and he took it away with

him. No man of this house shall go after him—I'll see to that."

Thorgils said nothing to Helga all the way home, but when he had her indoors he surprised her very much. She was in a great fright and thought she was going to be beaten; but instead of that he took her in his arms and kissed her well. Then she began to cry, and said that she was sorry. "My dear," he said, "it is I who am sorry. Until I had lost you I didn't know how much I wanted you. Now we understand each other, and things will go better between us." She slept in his arms, and in the morning found herself happy. "Why am I so happy to-day?" She asked Thorgils that. He pinched her cheek. "Go and ask the hens, my dear," he said. "They will tell you." But she wouldn't go.

The end of all this was that next year Helga had a son. They called him Grim, and he was the first of many. Yet Thorgils was sixty when Grim was born.

CHAPTER XXI

RECKONINGS WITH ASGRIM

NOW, towards the end of his life, when a man might look for peace and quietness, Thorgils began to find himself rubbing elbows with Asgrim Ellida-Grimsson. There is nothing surprising in that, since they were the two men of most consideration in the country, and Asgrim, at least, very much aware of it. There was this marked difference between them, that Thorgils was a great man and not aware how great he was, and Asgrim a great man who thought himself greater than he was. Asgrim made a show of his greatness; he was fond of ornament and trappings; he was pleased to ride about attended by many; he held himself to be above the law. He was a portly high-coloured man of much greater presence than Thorgils, who grew leaner as he grew older. On his broad back a scarlet cloak looked very magnificent. He was fond of wearing scarlet, and always had his clothes of the best Italian cloth that you

could buy. Fur was another weakness of his; broad trimmings of fur were on all his doublets, and in the winter he had a sable cloak, very fine indeed. Not only was he a landed man, but a great trader also, with ships for Norway, Ireland, Russia, and Germany. It was upon a matter of ships that he and Thorgils began to quarrel.

There was a good haven which ran into land belonging to Thorgils and friends of his. It was handy for Asgrim and often used by his vessels. But he would never pay the toll, nor allow his men to pay any. This had gone on for many years, and at last it became notorious, and Thorgils' collector complained of it. Thorgils said that he would speak to Asgrim when he came across him; and so he did.

He was riding down to the sea one day upon an old flea-bitten horse almost as lean as himself, alone, in his shabby leather jacket, with his cloak twisted about him—for it was cold weather—when he met with a company riding up; six or eight men talking and laughing together, and Asgrim in front of them in his famous sables, riding alone on a great white stallion. Thorgils, looking mean and withered in

the wind, reined up and nodded his head sideways to Asgrim. The great man stared, and puffed out his cheeks; but he also reined up.

"I am glad to meet with you," says Thorgils. "There is a little matter of harbour-dues to square between us."

"Ho, indeed," says Asgrim. "How may that be?" "Why, it is like this," says Thorgils. "Your shipmen use the haven out yonder, and come and go as they please; but they don't pay the toll. When it is asked for they speak of you."

"They do well," says Asgrim; "they do well."

"They do, I suppose, as they are told," says Thorgils; "but my people don't grow fat on such words as they use. Now I ask you to remember that the land belongs to me and my friends, and that everybody pays the tolls but you." He fixed Asgrim with a shrewd but friendly eye, and made him feel cross.

He looked about, but Thorgils' eye did not leave him; he grew rather red and felt his anger rising. "I can't speak about it now," he said.

"Why not," said Thorgils, "if I can speak about it?" Then Asgrim was angry.

"The sea is open to all ships," he said, "to mine as well as other people's. It is not my custom to be troubled with petty customs, a penny here, or a penny there. These are for fishermen and little men. You must not claim your pennies of me."

"I shan't claim them any more," said Thorgils, and rode on. Asgrim thought that he had got the better of him, and so did his respectful following. There was much laughter among them as they went their way—and Thorgils heard it.

Nothing more was said or done until the spring, when Asgrim gave out word that he was launching a ship down at the haven. The news went about the country and a number of people came out to see the sight. It was low water, and Asgrim was out on the sands with a deal of company, meaning to warp the ship out of the dock into the river. He looked very noble in his scarlet, edged with black fur, and though it was a foul shore, full of pools and pits of water, he did not disdain to take command of the rope, nor to haul at it himself. A number of hands, women as well as men, laid hold; behind



them all was Asgrim—and behind him was a deep pool of water.

Asgrim gave the word, and they all began to haul. Down the shore came a rider on a thin horse, a tall man with a long-handled axe in his hand. He stayed looking at the company for a while. The rope was taut, all the haulers, men, women, and Asgrim, were leaning backwards, straining for their lives. The single rider moved forward, and stood up against the rope. The axe flashed in the air and came down sharp—the rope parted, and all the people fell backwards, Asgrim souse into the pool, women on top of him, men on their backs in the wet sand. There went up a wave of laughter from the lookers-on, all the way from the sands to the dry land; but Thorgils sat motionless on his horse and did not laugh at all.

For some time nothing could be seen of Asgrim but his feet in commotion. Then his red back could be seen wallowing in the water, and finally he dragged himself out, and men began to fish for their wives and mothers. Asgrim was too full of water and too empty of breath to do more than splutter and wheeze—but after a while he remembered his dignity and stared

about to see who was laughing at him. He saw that everybody was, or had just been laughing. Even his son Thorhall, who stood close to him, was helpless with mirth. "Don't be such a fool," Asgrim said, but Thorhall could only wag his head and cling to his own knees.

"Who did this villainy?" Asgrim cried out, and Thorhall, rocking about, holding his knees, wagged his head without speaking. Asgrim flung himself round and caught a young man by the ear. "Tell me who did that, you," he said, "or you shall repent it." The young man pointed to Thorgils, who still sat his horse where he had been when he cut the rope. Asgrim stared. "Who is that man? Where does he come from?" But he knew who it was.

There was nothing to be done. Everybody was laughing, and the more angry he grew the more they laughed. He had only to turn to a man to make him twist about in an agony of laughing. Men implored him not to look at them lest they might rupture themselves and perhaps die. The only two people not laughing upon that shore were Asgrim and Thorgils. From the ship itself, far out in the dock, came

the sound of men laughing and slapping each other on the back.

Asgrim gave it up, and went away without a word to Thorgils. But one of the men on the shore in the space between the spasms of his laughter was able to ask, "Why did you do it? Oh, why did you do it?" and Thorgils said, "Ship's toll," before he turned his horse and rode thoughtfully home.

In the evening when people had somewhat recovered themselves Asgrim told Thorhall his son that he could not overlook such an insult. Thorhall struggled with himself, and managed to say that he thought his father had better go abroad. "You will find," he said, "that everything you may do will make people laugh again. I suppose you don't know what you looked like; but if you will excuse me I won't attempt to tell you, because it will make me ill. Nevertheless, as I said, my advice is that you should go abroad for a while."

Asgrim said that he should do nothing of the kind. He was exceedingly angry; but the worst of it was that he was compelled to avoid Thorgils. Whenever he came across him the people with him were reminded of the affair of the

launch and looked at each other, and then quickly looked away.

It was long before the business of the launch was forgotten; but Asgrim remembered it longer than anybody else, and was careful not to come in Thorgils' way; and when it happened later on that Thorhall wanted to marry a daughter of Bearne's and Thorny's, and asked his father to ask for her, Asgrim made it a point of the bargain that Thorgils should not be asked to the wedding.

Bearne rubbed his chin. "As to that," he said, "things are so here that Thorgils will be welcome whenever he comes, and nothing will be done to keep him out of the house." Asgrim had known that before, but it made him impatient to be reminded of it.

"I may not seem unreasonable," he said, "and I don't wish to be so; but there is a difference between making a man welcome and bidding him to a feast. Remembering how things are between us, I ask you not to summon him as a guest."

Bearne agreed to that, and kept the matter to himself, but of course it was spread about. Thorgils, after his usual fashion, said nothing;

but Helga was offended, and said it was very odd if she could not see her step-granddaughter married. Thorgils told her that she should go.

Accordingly one fine morning Thorny, at the door of her house, looking down the hillside, saw a rider come out of the wood and begin to mount the rise towards her. She called back to Bearne, "Here comes somebody this way, and if it isn't my father it's his ghost." Bearne went out in a hurry to meet him. Thorgils greeted him, and then he said, "You have a wedding before you, I hear. Now it is strange that you haven't bidden us—and we think that we are in the cold."

Bearne said, "Why, how could that be? We know that you and Helga can ask yourselves, and proud shall we be to see you here whenever you care to come."

"So I thought," said Thorgils, and brought over Helga the night before the wedding; and there they were at the door when Asgrim and his company came riding up.

Asgrim stopped dead on the hill. "There's that accursed old Thorgils," he said. "Now I go no further, since I cannot suffer his insults."

"Never mind him now," says Thorhall.
"Consider him beneath your notice."

"How am I to do that if he is not so?" cried Asgrim; but he had to go on. He was sore all over, and the friendly greeting of Thorgils made him no better. In fact, he behaved badly, and meditated worse. He determined that he must get rid of Thorgils. Thorgils watched him with a queer gleam in his eye—the sort of look which a man shows when he has a salmon lightly hooked in heavy water, and prepares for anything to happen.

But it was a dull feast. Thorgils said very little, and Asgrim hardly anything; for whenever he began to talk loudly he saw Thorgils looking at him as if he were amused, and stopped. All this maddened Asgrim.

CHAPTER XXII

ASGRIM'S MONEY

NOW there was bustle in and about the garth, for it was the morrow of the feast when men were getting ready to ride out. Thorgils, who was quite at home at the Pit, was in no sort of hurry, so stood about talking to the others, or at his favourite sport of watching them and getting quiet amusement out of their tricks and ways. In particular he observed Asgrim's cavalcade making preparations: fine horses, fine accoutrements and thralls who shone, as it were, with a reflected splendour from their proud master. Asgrim himself was not to be seen, but his reeve was much to be observed. In his smaller way he reproduced the habit of his lord; he puffed out his cheeks and exploded his breath, he stared and opened his mouth in the same way; he said, "God bless me!" or "What's the meaning of this, my man?"—just as Asgrim might. And he did not know, any more than Asgrim did, how un-

commonly like a goose in a farmyard he was, with a small soaring head wagging above a bulging breast.

Then, as he leaned by the house wall watching all this, Thorgils' eye caught a gleam of red down below the house on the edge of the wood. There was Asgrim, down there, talking with a man.

The man was a thrall—and more than that, it was a thrall of his from Treadholt, and not one of Asgrim's own. What did this mean? Thorgils kept his eye fixed upon them. He saw Asgrim talking earnestly; with one hand up he made quick gestures, and then a lunge forward. The thrall had his head bent, but was listening closely. When Asgrim had finished, the other looked all about him, into the wood, out into the meadows, down into the valley where the river ran boiling and foaming among the rocks. After some time, and after another word or two from Asgrim, he looked up and spoke a few sentences. Then Asgrim opened his wallet and took out something in his fist. Thorgils was now absorbed in observation. He saw Asgrim deal out his handful piece by piece into his other hand. After a time he paused and showed his

new handful to the thrall. The thrall shifted about; they talked both at once; then Asgrim dealt out more pieces—and the thrall took the handful and put it into a cloth, and stuffed the whole into his breast. They parted with a word or two more. Asgrim went along the woodside; the thrall slipped into it. Thorgils leaned motionless by the house and waited. It was a long time before he saw either of them again, but when he did, it was Asgrim first.

Asgrim came round the house from the back of it, and found himself face to face with Thorgils. He stopped and puffed out his cheeks; his eyes flickered; but he came on, and greeted his enemy. "So, neighbour! Much bustle this morning! But to-night, I daresay, all will be quiet enough."

"Some will be quiet," said Thorgils; "but some will be unquiet. Mostly it runs like this, that as men do so they sleep."

"Yes, yes," said Asgrim; "and so it should be. Are you away early?"

"I might be," said Thorgils—and just then he saw his thrall come in from the other side and enter the house.

Asgrim and his retinue were mounted and

away soon after dinner. Then Thorgils gave the word for saddling, and had all ready by four o'clock in the afternoon. Just at the last moment, when Helga was mounted, and all the company waited for Thorgils, he seemed to remember something which he must see about. He said to Helga, "Do you go on with all of them by the valley. I shall overtake you, going over the hill. Look for me at the ferry. If I am not there, wait for me half an hour—not more." Then to the thrall who had taken Asgrim's money he said, "Walk my horse and your own. I shall have something for you to carry." The man lowered his eyes, but had nothing to say. Thorgils went back into the house and stayed there for an hour; then he came out with a sack full of hay or something soft, and gave that to the thrall to carry. He mounted his horse with difficulty, for he was now old and stiff, and led the way up the hill. The thrall followed him.

At the top of the hill Thorgils waited for the man to come up. "I see you have a good axe on you," he said. "Where did you get that from?" The thrall said that he had found it in the river-bed as they were riding to the Pit, and

that he had ground it up at the house. Thorgils said, "Let me look at it," and leaned over to reach it. He put out his hand for it and touched the breast of the thrall with his wrist. He then felt the hard lump of the money which he had hidden there, tied up in a cloth. The thrall himself was as white as cloth when he handed over the axe. Thorgils took it from him, looked at it and hung it over his saddle-bow. Then he said, "Now give me Asgrim's money which you have in your breast." The man breathed sharply through his nose, and fumbled for the bundle. It was handed over. Thorgils took it. His eyes blazed. "You dog," he said between his teeth and struck the man in the face. The thrall turned his head aside to avoid it, and Earth-house-prey flashed in the air. The head rolled into the heather; the body swayed and fell under the horse, but the feet still held, and slewed the saddle round.

Thorgils put the head in the sack of hay, freed the saddle and righted it, and went his way down the hill, leading the horse. Already his rage had left him. He was now thinking what Asgrim would look like when he had his money back and the head into the bargain. "Money well

laid out," he said to himself, " and returned with interest."

He found Helga waiting for him at the ferry. She had been there half an hour. " Why are you so late? " she said, " and what have you done with Haurd? "

" Haurd had money," he said, " and offered it for his freedom. Now he has got it."

CHAPTER XXIII

THE LAST BATTLE

ASGRIM Ellida-Grimsson was not directly answerable for Thorgils' last battle; but in a sense he was. He hoped that mischief would ensue, and mischief did—yet he put it so that nothing could be brought home to him.

Thorgils had been ill all the winter with a chill which he had taken when it began, and which settled on his chest and would not leave him. Helga never left him either, but was devoted; and when he was able to get out of bed and look at his spindle shanks he first read his emaciation in her kind eyes. They were full of trouble. "My dear," she said, "it makes me sad to look at you." "I don't wonder at it," he said. "You say to yourself, That is a stony field I have been tending. What sort of a crop off that, after all my pains?"

"No," she said, "I don't say that." "Then what do you say?" "I say that I shall love to see you well again and out in the world; and

lean as you are I'd rather have you with me than any man I ever saw yet." "That's good news," said Thorgils, "and I shall get fatter on it." He never did that, but he was up and about before the spring weather came; and when once he was on his feet again nothing could keep him within doors. He had grown to be very fond of Bearne of the Pit in his old age, partly for his own sake, but mostly for Thorney's. She reminded him of Thorey, whom he had never forgotten for an hour together. He liked in these days to sit with his arms on the arms of a chair, and see Thorney going about her affairs.

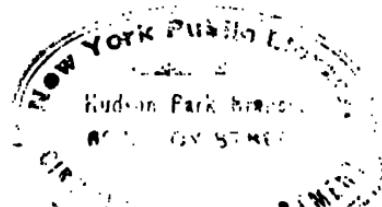
Directly he was well enough to mount his horse he must needs go over to Pit, and it was going over there that he met Helge and fought his last battle.

Helge was a man from the East country, a shipman and acquaintance of Asgrim's, who brought a ship into Einar's haven with stores for Asgrim. Asgrim had been waiting for him down at the Haven, had gone aboard when the ship was berthed, and sampled his goods. He said that he wouldn't stay, and directed Helge to ride up to his house as soon as he had landed his freight—"And if a crow-faced old rogue

named Thorgils should be in your road and you should happen to give him a fall," he said, " why, you will be none the less welcome for that." There will be a man of his on to you for toll, like enough," he said, " but never you pay it. That's an old quarrel between us, and maybe he thinks he has bested me over it—but I don't know who is likely to laugh last in it yet. There will be a good laugh for me if you should turn him into the mire. So much I will tell you." Then he got down into his boat and was pulled away.

By-and-by, sure enough, a boat came alongside with a man in her asking for the toll. Helge said that he had orders not to pay it. " You must answer to my master for that," said the toll-maker; " Thorgils of Treadholt is his name, a man of great worship in this country. It is nothing to do with me." Helge said that he would answer or not as it came to him when he met Thorgils.

The road from the Haven crossed that to the Pit, and just thereabouts the two men met. It was blowing keenly from the North-west with a powdery snow, and Thorgils, who felt the cold, was huddled up in his cloak, and crouched over



his horse's neck to escape what he could of it. Helge, looking him over, said, "This old atomy must be my man. We'll soon have him on his back, I believe."

It was not at all difficult to jostle into Thorgils, who was not looking out for anything of the sort. As nearly as could be, he was out of the saddle. "What are you doing, my friend?" he cried out sharply. "Is the road too straight for you? And who may you be then who drive into your betters?" He added this last question because Helge was laughing at him.

Helge now set his arms akimbo, and stuck out his feet. "Betters, old master! Than whom are you the better on this road? And who might *you* be, with your foot in the grave?"

Thorgils told his name. "That is what they call me who know me."

Helge said, "That was the name of a fighting man, I understood. But some say it is the name of a toll-monger who now and then gets more than he asks for. Now which Thorgils of these might *you* be? Or are you the grandfather of both of them?"

Thorgils became angry. "You shall find out who I am, my fine sir," he said. "I am one

who has never been men's laughing-stock yet, and shall not be now. Swing your axe, man, and face me now in battle. That is the way to prove it."

The wind was sharp in his face, and he was still screwed up to avoid it. Helge scorned him in his heart, but nevertheless he swung out his axe, saying as he did so, "Little enough to prove upon your weevilly carcass, I'm thinking. And what shall be left for the worms if I carve it now!"

But Thorgils was looking at his axe. "You will do little with that. It's no weapon to bite into my skull—but you have brought it on yourself."

His eyes narrowed down to fine lines of light, and his lips were stretched to a grin. He looked both wicked and happy at once, huddled up in the saddle—and he was just what he looked, having a zest for battle and a keen rage against his adversary in his heart.

Helge had backed his horse somewhat, and now came on. Thorgils waited for him; angry as he was, and mettlesome, he did not mean to strike the first blow. Helge spurred forward, then, and aimed for the sword-arm; Thorgils

avoided that by spurring his horse sharply and twisting himself sideways; but the axe came down upon the calf of his leg, and though it was too blunt to make a bad wound, it made wound enough to inflame Thorgils. He turned his horse, and so had his back to the wind, and then at the moment Helge was facing him again. But before he had time to get the mockery out of his face, suddenly, as he scorned him, the old man became transformed into the likeness of a striking snake. His head lifted, his body straightened; then the whole of him darted forward. Earth-house-prey streaked the air like a flash of lightning, and struck Helge on the shoulder. The axe dropped, and the arm with it. Helge threw back his head and groaned; then toppled sideways and fell to earth. Thorgils, his rage still high in him, rode on his way into the teeth of the wind. He felt his leg stiffening; and when he reached the Pit, he had to be lifted down from horseback.

But before he had reached the Pit his anger had left him, and he was sorry for what he had done. He told Bearne about it. "That hot-faced dumpling of a man bounced me into it. I ought to have known better. I am an old fool.

But now I've killed him, and must take the consequences of it. See what you can do for me, son-in-law; but take notice that I will pay full weregild for the slaughter. It was forced upon me by insolence—and a man grows touchy as he grows old—but the challenge came from me; and now I am sorry for it."

That was Thorgils' last battle, and the ride to the Pit was his last ride too. His leg stiffened and remained stiff. He had to be carried home to Treadholt, and could never again walk without the help of a stick. Nothing followed upon the battle for some time. Asgrim made no claim, did nothing at all; but news travelled slowly about Iceland in those days, and Thorgils always said that something more would be heard of it. Bearne went to the Thing that summer and proclaimed the slaughter there, offering weregild on Thorgils' behalf. No claim was set up. It was two years, they say, before the affair was moved again—and by that time Thorgils was past his work, and lay long abed. The tale of Helge's vindication will be the last I have to tell about Thorgils.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE LAST THORGILISM

IT was in early summer, the last that Thorgils was to see, that two brothers of Helge's came over to Einar's haven in a ship from the East. They were Einar and Sigurd by name, and their coming was a secret. Asgrim had nothing to do with it. They came in late one evening, moored their ship, were aland, themselves and their horses, and away betimes before anybody had news of them. They made fast riding, and reached Treadholt by nine o'clock in the morning.

The place was very quiet, for all the men were away at the hay-harvest, the women were busy, and old Thorgils lying in his bed looking at the sunlight dancing on the wall. The sun hit the water in a bucket outside, and the flicker that he saw was reflected from the water.

Einar and Sigurd had left their horses below the garth, and walked up to the house. At the

door, which was open, they stopped and whispered together. Sigurd said, "We shall have no trouble here. They are all out and about." Einar said nothing, and then Sigurd asked him, "Who shall do it, you or I?" Einar looked all about before he spoke. Then he said, "I don't much care about this. It seems a bad job to me for the two of us to kill an old man in his bed, a man who has had a life of renown and good report. He must be near his death in any case. I tell you, I don't like it."

Thorgils heard them muttering, but not what they said. He turned out of bed directly, and covered himself with his old cloak. Then he picked up Earth-house-prey, which always slept with him, picked up his stick and hobbled out into the hall. The two men at the door saw him coming, and stared open-mouthed at him. Thorgils stood shaking in mid-hall; he wasn't very steady on his feet the first thing in the morning, as he always woke up stiff.

"Now come in, the pair of you," he said, "and have what you can get of me."

They hesitated at first, but then came into the hall, and stood watching Thorgils.

"Who may you be," Thorgils asked them,

" who came up here with your weapons ready? "

Sigurd said, " We are the brethren of Helge whom you slew." Thorgils nodded his head.

" I thought as much," he answered. " I laid an egg that day which I thought would hatch out presently. Well, come and do what you can—and I will do what I can."

Then Einar said, " Thorgils, I am very unwilling to go on with this, and my brother here is likeminded with me. If I have anything to do with it we will compose this quarrel." Then he threw his sword down and waited where he was.

Thorgils' old eyes shone, and his face became friendly at once. " You speak like a man," he said, " and you may be sure I have had enough fighting by this time. Now I'll tell you the truth. Your brother Helge made me angry, less on his own account than on that of the man who egged him on. And he wasn't quick enough for me, and was ill-armed—and so I told him. But there it was. I killed him, and was sorry for it, and ready to pay my debt at any time. But now you treat me better than I deserve, and shall have my friendship if you will take it. I will pay weregild for Helge here and

now; and to you"—he spoke to Einar—"I will give this good sword of mine. Earth-house-prey I call it, for I took it out of the earth, long ago in Ireland; and I've worn it fifty years; and a good friend it has been to me. There's no better sword in this country, and it will do you credit, and you it—for you are a fine man. As for you"—this to Sigurd—"you shall take five marks of silver from me, if you please, and reckon up with your brother afterwards."

Then he called Helga to come in and serve them with drink; and they parted on good terms.

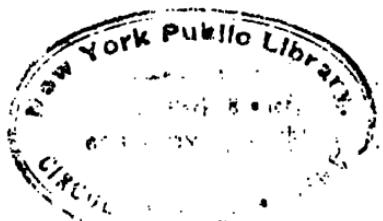
He told Helga afterwards that he should die very soon, because the better part of him was gone now. He said that he wished to die at the Pit, but didn't tell her the reason. So when the hay was all in, he was carried over to Bearne's house—and there he took to his bed, and there he died.

His mind wandered very much towards the end. He thought that Thorny was her mother, and that they were all in the wooden house in the desert bay. He used to stroke her hair, and tell her to have patience and courage.

"All will go well, my dear," he was fond of telling her, "for you and I have been lovers from the beginning, and love outlives the dark."

Helga took it bravely.

THE END











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